Latest Toyota Yaris Hybrid – Road Test

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Latest revised Toyota Yaris range includes the less taxing hybrid

Assessed by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The Yaris supermini sized hatchback, in three and five door forms, was first launched in 1999 and became European Car of the Year 2000. Now in its third generation five-door only form it has received a mid-life refresh. Actually it's more than a refresh with 900 new parts, say Toyota, including the introduction of a new 1.5 litre petrol engine which replaces the previous 1.33 litre unit and the petrol-electric hybrid variants now take 40% of sales in Europe.

Built in France since 2001, the Yaris has achieved over three million global sales. Since UK sales started, over 524,000 have been sold with 30,402 in 2016 – with the hybrid models being the most popular.

UK sales of Alternatively Fuelled Vehicles (AFVs), which include petrol-electric hybrids, have recorded a 31.4% growth for the first seven months of this year in an overall market down by 2.2%. Sales of petrol models are up by 4.3% whilst diesels have dropped by 11% in the fallout from VW Group's 'dieselgate' scandal and the British Governments change in VED road tax costs.

Today's Toyota Yaris range of five-door models is available with the choice of 1.0 litre VVT-i 69 hp and the new 1.5 litre VVT-i 111 hp petrol engines, plus the new 1.5 litre 100 hp petrol electric hybrid with an automatic CVT transmission fitted as standard.

Later this year the range will be extended to include a 'hot' version known as the Yaris GRMN, inspired by Toyota's return to the World Rally Championship with the Yaris WRC. This limited edition version, just 100 units for the UK out of a total build of 400 units, will be powered by a 1.8 litre supercharged 205 bhp petrol engine. No price as yet!

Those all-important CO2 emission figures for today's mainstream Yaris versions range from a low 75 g/km up to 112 g/km so First Year VED can costs as little as £15 for the hybrid with its £10 alternative fuel discount, going up to £160 for the 1.5 litre petrol models. The Combined Cycle fuel economy ranges from 85.6 mpg for the hybrid to 58.9 mpg for the 1.5 litre, depending on the wheel sizes. Benefit-in-Kind company car tax is a low 13% for the hybrid rising up to 21% for the 1.5 petrol. Insurance groups start at a low 2E for the 1.0 litre petrol, from 9E for the 1.5 litre petrol and 8E for the hybrid versions. All versions are covered by a five year 100,000 mile warranty.



Prices start from £12,995 and rise through 26 derivatives to £19,845. The hybrid models start from £16,195. Depending on the power unit chosen the core specification levels with revised higher equipment levels are Active, Icon, Icon Tech, Design, Bi-tone and Excel. All versions are now fitted with Toyota Safety Sense as standard, which includes Pre-Collision Alert System with Autonomous Braking, Automatic High Beam, Lane Departure Warning and Road Sign Assist on all versions except the entry level grade.

All versions benefit from revised exterior styling, aimed at giving the 3,950 mm (12.96 ft) long five door hatchback a more athletic and sporty look. Sharper horizontal styling lines and lower door mouldings to the side and rear emphasis the wedge-shaped side stance, and horizontal lines portray a wider stance and a low centre of gravity. At the front is a larger

bumper and big trapezoidal grille with redesigned headlights, and at the rear there is a new style wide tailgate, revised light clusters and muscular bumper. Inside there are new cabin upholsteries and trims with new colour choices plus a revised new 4.2-inch colour multi-information display for most versions.

My test drive model was the 1.5 litre petrol-electric hybrid with the top of the range Excel trim and equipment. This spec is fully comprehensive except that Toyota Touch 2 Go sat-nav with access to connected and on-line services was fitted and that costs an extra £650 and has to be added to the costly £19,295 on-the-road price.

Whilst the new exterior styling adds to the kerb appeal, the interior looked bland – disappointing as this is the top of the range model. It wasn't missing for specification but it looked boringly functional in its layout and not enhanced by the quality and the amount of hard, scratchy plastic trim. It certainly looked well put together so it is more 'durable' than inspiring. With the popularity of the hybrid model Toyota has made more detailed changes to that than other versions. These include improved sound-deadening and revised suspension updates for a more pleasant driving experience as customers moving from higher premium grade models to hybrids expect more refinement and equipment. So it's even more disappointing that the overall interior doesn't look and feel better.

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As for the driving experience, it couldn't be simpler! It's not an engaging 'drive' but it is an efficient one in terms of low running costs. The Yaris hybrid, with its petrol engine and electric motor running in parallel, provides 100 hp and 111 Nm (82 lb.ft) of torque. At the push of the start button, engage drive with the CVT gearchange and the car will generally start off with the electric motor before the petrol engine seamlessly and quietly chimes in. The driver can select EV mode only for a very limited distance of electric motor power and also there is an ECO button to maximise fuel economy.

The real-life fuel economy depends more than with a petrol or diesel engine on the type of

motoring you do. There is no doubt it performs most efficiently in urban conditions where the stop-start driving uses the regenerative braking to top up the nickel metal-hybrid battery pack. Around town and local rural roads with more opportunities for braking or harvesting electric power on the overrun and going down hills, during my test driving time the Yaris returned a shade over 60 mpg. During motorway driving when there is little opportunity for regenerative braking the figure went as low as 45mpg. After returning to urban and local road journeys the overall figure recovered to 56.5 mpg. This was good, but not close to the official Combined Cycle figure of 78.5 mpg quoted for the Excel test model with its larger 16-inch wheels. Of course with the petrol-electric hybrid there is no range anxiety as with pure electric cars, but to maximise the fuel economy potential urban driving conditions suit the Yaris hybrid more than open road cruising speeds.

In keeping with its 'ECO' urban driving credentials the CVT auto transmission also works best at low to medium speed driving conditions. Look for acceleration on the open road and the engine becomes noisy under load. Top speed is a modest 103 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 11.8 seconds. Whilst those figures are not that impressive, the CO2 emissions for this Excel hybrid versions of 82 g/km and the low VED First Year £90 and £130 Standard rate will appeal. But a lower specification Yaris hybrid model which is cheaper to buy and with its smaller wheels and less equipment, the CO2 figure can be as low as 75 g/km when VED will cost £15 in the First Year rate before going up to £130 for the Standard rate. Company car tax will be lower as well, from 17% for this Excel model to 13% for some lower spec versions.

VERDICT

With the new Toyota Yaris hybrid you need to choose the version which suits you and your pocket best, AND bear in mind the type of main journeys you take. You also need to compare it with the latest generation superminis – models such as the new Ford Fiesta and Nissan Micra models with their small capacity turbocharged petrol engines. They can be just as fuel-efficient, faster and less pricey to buy. Yes they will cost more in VED and Benefit-in-Kind taxes but they have nicer visually appealing interior finishes to clinch the deal.

For: The only supermini range on sale in the UK with a full petrol-electric hybrid powertrain, low running and tax costs, easy to drive, good for urban use, improved specification, sportier exterior styling.

Against: Dull open road driving performance, bland interior styling with too much hard plastic trim, top spec hybrid models are pricey and have increased tax costs over low spec Yaris hybrid variants.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

2017 Toyota Yaris Excel Hybrid.

Price: £19,295 (£20,465 as tested).

Power unit/transmission: 1.5 litre, four cylinder DOHC normally aspirated petrol engine and 45kW electric motor, 100 hp, 111 Nm (82 lb.ft) of torque, CVT auto transmission.

Performance: 103 mph, 0–62 mph 11.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 78.5 mpg (56.5 mpg average on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 82 g/km, VED £90 First Year rate then £130 Standard rate including the alternative fuel £10 subsidy, BiK company car tax 17%.

Insurance Group: 8E.

Warranty: Five years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,945 mm (12.94 ft), W 1,695 mm (5.56 ft), H 1,510 mm (4.95 ft), boot/load space 286 to 768 litres (10.10 to 27.12 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.