Toyota – 25 years of UK manufacturing, and latest Auris Hybrid Road Test

Published: November 21, 2017

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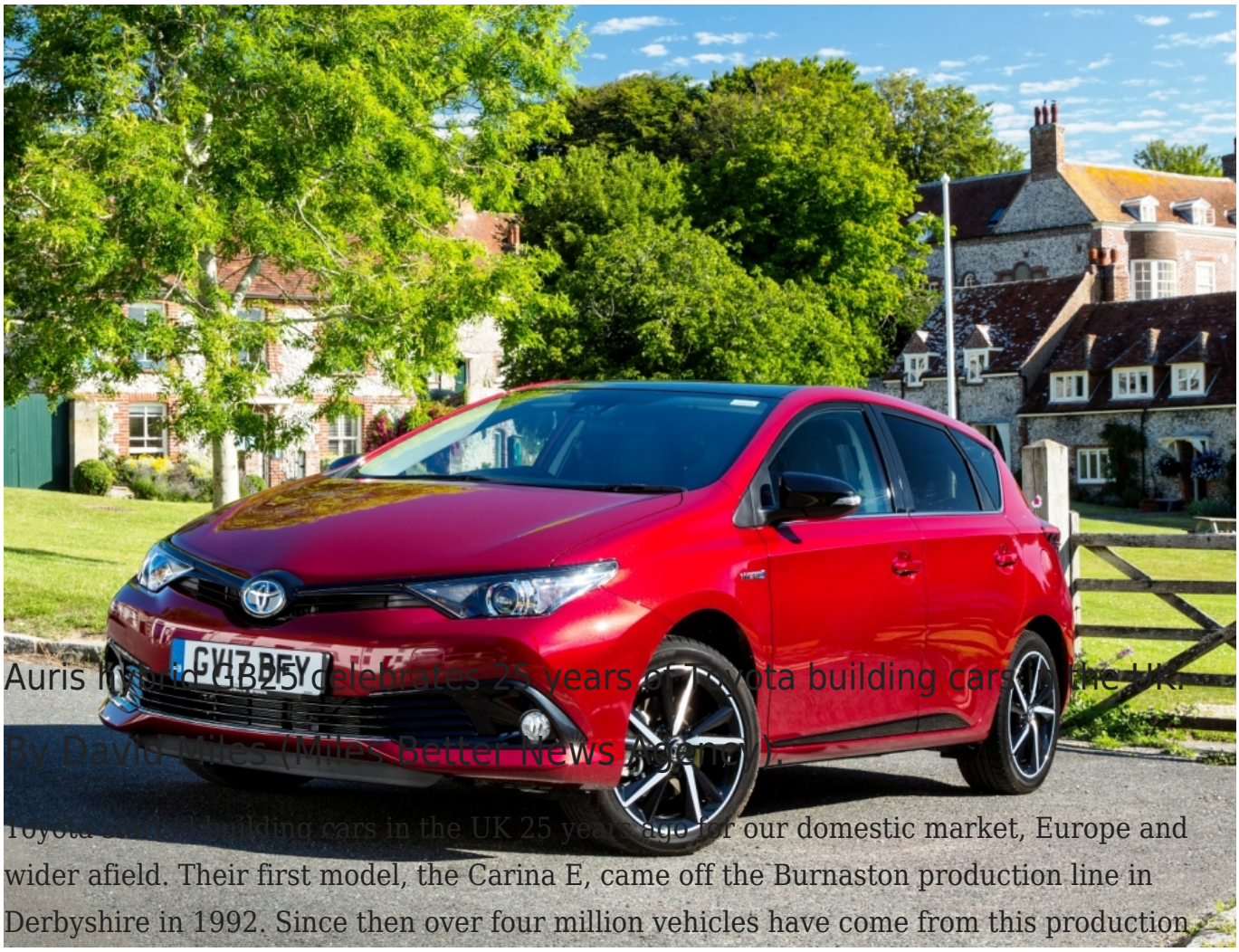
Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/toyota-25-years-of-uk-manufacturing-and-latest-auris-hybrid-road-test/



Auris Hybrid GB25 celebrates 25 years of Toyota building cars in the UK

By David Miles (Miles' Better News Agency)

Toyota started building cars in the UK 25 years ago for our domestic market, Europe and wider afield. Their first model, the Carina E, came off the Burnaston production line in Derbyshire in 1992. Since then over four million vehicles have come from this production facility, the latest being the Auris range of petrol, diesel and petrol-electric hybrid C-segment five door Hatchbacks and Touring Sports estates.

The Avensis Saloon and Tourer estates are also built there. Toyota Manufacturing UK also

builds engines at their Deeside Plant in North Wales, employing over 3,000 people at this and Burnaston facilities.

To celebrate their 25th anniversary TMUK has produced the special edition Auris Hybrid GB25 five door hatchback priced at £24,045. Prices for the 39 British built Auris hatchback and estate model derivatives start at £16,655 and rise to £26,905.

The engine range consists of 1.33 litre 99 hp petrol, a turbo 1.2 116 hp petrol, the 1.4 D4-D 90 hp turbodiesel, the 1.6 D4-D 112 hp turbodiesel and the 1.8 litre, 134 hp petrol-electric hybrid. Depending on the engine chosen there are Active, Icon, Business Edition, Design, GB25 and Excel specification levels.

Toyota has just passed the 200,000 sales mark for petrol-electric hybrid models to UK customers, ranging in model types from the Yaris supermini, through the Auris mid-sized hatchbacks and estates, to the larger Prius derivatives, the C-HR crossover and the RAV4 SUV.

The Auris is the top-selling Toyota hybrid in the UK and Europe and the hybrid version accounts for more than 70% of new Auris sales. Toyota first introduced their hybrid technology to the UK in 2000 when they achieved 184 Prius sales.

The special edition Auris Hybrid GB25 five door hatchback has a distinctive bi-tone exterior paint finish combining a contrasting black roof, front grille and door mirror casings with a choice of Tokyo Red, Pearl White or Aspen Grey bodywork. Its special status is marked out a by a “25 years building in Britain” badge, incorporating the Union flag.

In common with the latest Auris model year mild exterior styling, the GB25 variant has the revised front and rear ends to give it a more muscular look and to provide a bit more desirable kerb appeal. There is a more prominent front bumper with a full width lower grille housing deep pods for the for the fog lights. A stronger looking rear bumper emphasises the

width of the car. Viewed from the side the longer rear overhang elongates the car. There are new LED daytime running lights at the front and the rear LED light clusters use ‘signature’ indicator guide technology. A shark fin roof antenna completes the exterior re-styling but it still doesn’t stand of from the crowd of similar sized hatchbacks in a car park.

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Inside the latest re-styling includes a general improvement in quality with the use of soft-touch grained materials for the dashboard with a more integrated design for the instruments. There is a stronger and sportier looking instrument binnacle with ‘tubed’ speedometer and tachometer dials either side of a 4.2-inch TFT multi-information screen. The air vents, door handles and gear selector lever have a higher quality appearance, adding to the move to a more premium interior environment. The soundproofing has also been improved in the bulkhead area and additional sealing has been added around the door areas to reduce roads and wind noise entering the cabin

The cabin of the GB25 special edition hatchback is distinguished by black leather upholstery with a quilted finish for the backrest and cushion, and contrasting silver stitching – also featured on the armrests and dashboard trim.

The GB25 equipment items include 17-inch alloy wheels, rear privacy glass, full colour multi-information display, automatic air conditioning, power windows, push-button start and leather steering and shift lever trim.

The Toyota Touch 2 multimedia system has a seven-inch touchscreen centrally positioned in the fascia panel, co-ordinating functions including the six-speaker audio system with DAB radio, Bluetooth for hands-free phone operation and music streaming, and rear-view camera. Unfortunately the Toyota Touch 2 with Go sat-nav system is an extra cost option priced at £750.

Also fitted is the Toyota Safety Sense package which provides active systems that can help prevent an accident happening, or lessen the consequence if an impact does occur. Its

features include a Pre-Crash Safety system with autonomous emergency braking, Automatic High Beam for the headlights, Road Sign Assist and Lane Departure Warning.

The efficiency potential of the Toyota 1.8 litre petrol-electric full hybrid powertrain is well known and used in other model ranges. The combination of petrol and electric power not only helps keep ownership costs down, reduces the environmental impact of day-to-day driving through low CO2 and NOx, but it also does away with ‘range anxiety’ that pure electric models have. Also there is no down-time not driving because your car is being charged from the mains. But negatively it doesn’t have the plug-in facility that Toyota offers for some other models in their extensive range of petrol-electric hybrid models, which improves real-life fuel economy considerably, and increases the electric power only driving range from two to three miles to at least 10 times that amount.

The Toyota Hybrid Synergy Drive system's 1.8 litre VVT-i petrol engine and electric motor together generate maximum power of 134 hp, giving the Auris Hybrid hatchback a 0–62mph acceleration time of 10.9 seconds and a top speed of 112mph. In common with all other Toyota models the Auris hybrid is covered by a five-year/100,000 mile warranty.

The petrol-electric hybrid technology offers, in some circumstances, a quiet and relaxing drive, it's easy to use, push the start button, engage drive, push the accelerator and off you go. I found it nicer to drive on local journeys in and around town traffic and around country roads at speeds up to 50 mph; the petrol-electric system seemed to harvest battery power more effectively in those conditions. Longer high speeds runs on motorways can be harder work for the driver maintaining speed, and harder work for the powertrain and CVT auto transmission, providing power-on-demand for acceleration and maintaining cruising speeds with limited opportunity to replenish the battery pack. Under hard acceleration the engine

becomes noisy, sounded strained and felt sluggish, exactly the opposite for local driving when it was quiet and responsive.

Depending on the driving conditions the fuel economy varied between 40 and 74 mpg with an overall average for my week long driving returning 60.2 mpg. This was slightly better than a modern-day smallish capacity turbo petrol engine but not as good as a modern turbodiesel, but with fewer emissions than either of those. Officially this model will return 72.4 mpg in the Combined Cycle with CO2 emissions of 91 g/km. Other versions with less spec and smaller wheels can be as low as 79 g/km. However the 91g/km means that VED road tax cost £110 First Year rate and £130 thereafter, whilst Benefit-in-Kind tax for company car drivers is 17%. With CO2 at 79 g/km VED is £90 First Year rate and £130 thereafter and BiK tax remains at 17%

The engine's stop and start performance is seamless in urban traffic and the hybrid system runs almost silently when running only on electric motor power for a relatively short distance of a couple of miles before the petrol engine starts up. The Auris hybrid can run purely on electric motor power from start-up and at speeds up to around 44 mph. The system will automatically switch to electric power when possible (indicated by the green EV light illuminating in the instrument binnacle) to maximise efficiency. There are selectable EV, ECO and SPORT modes for the driver to choose from.

VERDICT

As you will be aware the demand for cleaner and greener cars, vans, lorries and buses is growing, fuelled by world legislation to reduce emissions. Toyota has been on that UK road since the year 2000 with their petrol-electric hybrids. The latest British-built Auris hybrid is yet another step along-the-way.

For: Built in Britain, low taxes, low emissions, low running costs, easy and economical to drive in urban areas.

Against: Struggles to easily maintain motorway cruising speeds so high speed cruising fuel

economy suffers, firm ride, limited rear seat legroom, no sat-nav as standard for this GB25 special edition model, no PHEV electric plug-in facility to improve electric driving range.

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

Toyota Auris GB25 Hybrid 5-Door Hatchback.

Price: £24,045.

Drivetrain: 1.8 litre, four cylinder DOHC VVT-i petrol engine combined with a 60 kW electric motor, nickel metal-hydride battery and CVT automatic transmission, combined power output 134 hp.

Performance: 112 mph, 0–62 mph 10.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 72.4 mpg, (60.2 mpg overall on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 91 g/km, VED First Year road tax £110 and then £130 thereafter, BiK company car tax 17%.

Insurance Group: 12E.

Warranty: Five years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,330 mm (14.21 ft), W 1,760 mm (5.77 ft), H 1,475 mm (4.84 ft), boot/load space 435 to 1,199 litres (15.36 to 42.34 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.