Toyota C-HR Hybrid SUV Road Test

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David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test drives Toyota's C-HR, the firm's latest Hybrid SUV.

Toyota took their time getting into the very profitable and high selling compact SUV market sector, leaving it to others with just their hybrid-core RAV4 as the option.

UK sales of what the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders call 'Dual Purpose' vehicles – what we know as 4x4s/SUVs and including some Crossovers – increased in the UK by 23.3% last year with 437,931 sales. This makes the sector the third largest behind Supermini (Ford Fiesta type) and Lower Medium (Ford Escort/Focus type). That figure didn't include some Crossovers where 2WD models are the mainstay of the type. These include the Nissans Qashqai and Juke, which Nissan designate as Lower Medium and Supermini cars. In Europe it was much the same story, with SUV/4×4/Crossover sales

growing by 21.4%.

For 2017 Toyota are now firmly in the game with the arrival of the futuristically-styled five door C-HR (Coupe High-Rider) compact Crossover. It is available with the choice of a 1.2 litre 115 hp turbocharged petrol engine with manual or auto gearbox options, with 2WD or 4WD models, or the likely most popular 1.8 litre 122 hp petrol-electric hybrid automatic with 2WD, using the same power unit as used in the Prius Hybrid.

Prices start at £20,995 and range up to £27,995 through three levels of specification – Icon, Excel and Dynamic. This makes the 1.8 petrol-electric hybrid auto models £1,400 more expensive than the 1.2 turbo automatic 2WD and £2,600 more costly than the 1.2 manual transmission 2WD versions.

Toyota in this buoyant market sector expects over 100,000 C-HR sales in Europe over the next 12 months and 75% of these will be for the hybrid versions due to their lower running costs. For the UK market Toyota GB expects to sell around 16,000 C-HRs in a full year, making it their third best-selling range behind the Yaris and Aygo models.

In the UK the C-HR with CO2 emissions for the 1.2 turbo models range between 134 and 144 g/km so the VED road tax is either £130 or £145 each year and company car Benefit-in-Kind tax 23 to 25% depending on the gearbox and 2WD/4WD configuration. On the other hand the 1.8 hybrid has CO2 emissions of 86 or 87 g/km, VED costs are £0 and BIK is 15%.

However the UK tax rates only run up to the end of March 2017 because from 1 April VED road tax levels increase significantly for new cars bought from that date onwards. The 1.2 petrol models will be £200 First Year rate and £140 each subsequent year with BIK going up to between 25 and 27%. The 1.8 hybrid will cost £90 for First Year rate VED and then £130 onwards with BIK tax being 17%. As always with any new car my advice is buy now and make sure the vehicle is registered before the end of March.

The new C-HR in both engine forms sits on the latest Toyota New Global Platform as used for the latest Prius. Its radical styling has a coupé-like upper body with the muscular lower

wide stance of an SUV. With a length of 4,360 mm (14.30 ft) it is dimensionally similar to the best-selling Nissan Qashqai SUV but with its coupé cabin it comparable with the smaller Nissan Juke. Look on it has a high stance Prius in a radical suit of new clothes.

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The front end is a combination of multi-layers of aerodynamic bodywork with a wide slim grille flanked by sleek headlights and below that, centrally mounted in the strong-looking bumper, is a large grille, and below that what looks like a skid plate. A steeply raked windscreen leads to a coupé-style roof which in turn leads to a steeply raked forwards rear tailgate window, and above that is a large roof spoiler. The side profile has a rising high level waistline and there are deeply sculptured styling lines running over the wide front wheelarches, along the lower door panels and then over the wide rear haunches.

At the rear is a lift-up tailgate giving access to a compact 377 litre (13.31 cu.ft) boot, about the same size as that of Audi’s new Q2 small SUV. Unfortunately the boot doesn’t have an adjustable height floor so items have to be loaded over a deep sill. The rear seat backs fold 60/40 to give further load space.



My test car had the main body in white, with a black roof and upper rear quarter panels which added to the impressive styling. I've seen a couple of other C-HRs in a dark solid body and the same roof colour and they do not look quite so striking.


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Unnamed road



Inside at the rear the seat space is reasonable but with the low coupé roof line, small rear window and tiny rear side windows it will be claustrophobic for some passengers. With the ‘pinched’ styling over the rear wheelarches it reduces the interior width so it’s more of a two seater for adults in the rear than providing three seats.

Inside at the front the radical styling continues with a sweeping multi-layered dashboard linking nicelywith the sculptured interior door panels. Showing its eco credentials the hybrid version has a sweeping blue styling trim line running the full width of the fascia panel, over the centrally positioned 8-inch touchscreen and down into the door trim sections. Beneath the infotainment touchscreen are easy to reach and see heater and ventilation controls. The seats are comfortable and the trim throughout, including soft feel plastic, is a big improvement over what we have experienced in the past with some Toyota models such as the Prius. Whilst the rear interior of the C-HR is cosy the front is roomier

and generally provides a nice futuristic classy environment.

The level of spec is impressive as well, with even the base Icon level having dual zone air con, 17-inch alloys, Toyota Touch 2 touchscreen multimedia system, front fog lights, rain sensing wipers, Toyota Safety Sense pre-collision system with adaptive cruise control, lane departure alert, auto high beam lights, road sign alerts, electric parking brake and electrically operated front and rear windows. The best selling mid-range Excel additions include part-leather seat upholstery, heated front seats, smart keyless entry, parking sensors and park assist, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane change assist, sat-nav and 18-inch alloy wheels. The top level Dynamic spec additions include metallic paint with a contrast black roof, privacy glass and LED headlights and fog lights. Of course there are options and option packs for personalisation. These, depending on the grade of model chosen, include Tech Pack, Leather Pack, Premium Pack, Entertainment Pack and Sports Pack.

My C-HR test version was the 1.8 hybrid CVT Dynamic priced at £27,995. This has 2WD as standard and uses the latest Prius platform and upgraded Toyota Synergy Drive hybrid system. This uses a 1.8 litre, four-cylinder normally-aspirated petrol engine with 97 bhp, combined with an electric motor to give a total of 120 bhp. Drive through the CVT automatic transmission is to the front wheels with a selectable choice of EV, Power or Eco modes.



Top speed is a modest 105 mph, with a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 11 seconds. Officially this model will return 72.4 mpg in the Combined Cycle with CO2 emissions of 87 g/km. This currently means VED road tax is £0 and company car drivers will pay a low 15% in Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is rated as Group 16A.

In real-life driving conditions covering nearly 500-miles my test car returned an overall average of 55.1 mpg on all types of roads, and including some long motorway mileage. At best for some 50 mph cruising speeds I did see 62.5 mpg on the computer but a combination of 70 mph motorway speeds and some slow local driving brought it down to the mid 50s. It is exceptionably easy to drive; get in, seatbelt on, push start button, select Drive and it silently pulls away before the petrol engine smoothly and quietly chimes in.

Given it has a 1.8 litre petrol engine with a power-sapping CVT continuously variable auto

gearbox it was acceptable, but the low tax costs offset the mediocre performance. Generally the petrol-electric hybrid system worked smoothly enough but under acceleration there was a constant drone. I'm told the 1.2 litre turbo petrol engined versions are more lively and agile but of course less tax efficient although cheaper to buy.

The handling was composed and surefooted during cornering with reasonable steering feedback and the ride comfort was good overall.

VERDICT

Those past, or potential future buyers, of a Toyota Prius who want something significantly more visually exciting with more 'street-cred', a much higher interior quality of the front cabin and are not too worried about the space given over to rear seat passengers should give the C-HR serious consideration.

For: Radical eye-catching exterior styling, futuristic front interior design, well-equipped, low tax costs, a much more fashionable choice than a Prius Hybrid.

Against: Costly to buy in this compact Crossover sector but cheap to run, limited rear cabin space, restricted rear/rear quarter visibility, needs an adjustable height boot floor, noisy engine under acceleration, no 4WD Hybrid or diesel options.

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

Toyota C-HR Dynamic Hybrid 1.8 CVT.

Price: £27,995.

Engine/transmission: 1.8 litre, four cylinder normally aspirated petrol with electric motor, total power output 120 hp, CVT auto gearbox, front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62mph: 11 seconds.

Top speed: 105 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 72.4 mpg (55.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 87 g/km, VED £0, BIK company car tax 15%.

Insurance Group: 16A.

Warranty: Five years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,360 mm (14.30 ft), W 1,795 mm (5.89 ft), H 1,565 mm (5.14 ft), boot space 377 litres (13.31 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.