



Toyota Corolla 1.8 Touring Sport – First Impressions.

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Chris Adamson test drives the latest Toyota Corolla 1.8 Touring Sport – and contrasts it with his own first Toyota....

(Photos: Toyota GB).

Back in the mid-1980s the second car I ever bought was a nearly new Toyota Corolla SR liftback that I drove all round the UK and even took on holiday to France.



It served me well for many years, never gave me any problems and I have to say there was a little bit of sadness when I eventually sold it to trade-up in the motoring world.

In the early 90s I ran a new, sixth generation, Corolla on a long-term test for 12 months and it too operated without a hitch, so, I have always had a soft-spot for the Corolla even when it went into a rather anonymous looking design period and became the butt of abuse from one Mr J Clarkson. There was some disappointment when Toyota ditched the name for what had by then become the world's best-selling car model and then, both surprise and relief, when they re-introduced the name to bring back some credibility to a Toyota model sector that was becoming rather anonymous.

This bring us up-to-date where I find myself (if only briefly) behind the wheel of a new British built 12th generation Corolla in the shape of the Touring Sport 1.8 self-charging hybrid that, in essence, is the spiritual successor of that SR liftback of three decades ago.

It looks very different to the SR and demonstrates how much vehicle design has changed with a lot more focus here on the practicalities of life with just a hint of contemporary styling.

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Among the latest crop of small estates, the low sitting Touring Sport is one of the better looking with its sharp front cut lines, deep angular grille and multi-faceted headlights that combine to give it a sporting accent.

Admittedly the less sculptured rear has to conform to the demands of load carrying but still has a bit of personality of its own with muscular rear shoulders and flared wheel arches and a steeply raked rear screen.

At more than 4.6 metres (15.09 ft) long and with an extended 2.7 metre (8.86 ft) wheelbase the five-door Touring Sport offers plenty of comfortable passenger and luggage accommodation – rear occupant space is claimed best in class.



Its 598 litre (21.12 cu.ft) boot (with the rear seats in place) is quite substantial and with a conveniently reduced step-over the tailgate, should be more than adequate for a continental touring holiday should I decide to re-create my French experience all those years ago.



Some might find the rather austere cabin a little drab but after the fussiness of some recent Toyotas it's rather soothing not to be faced with rows of dials and display screens.



The minimal use of materials helps to create a harmonious atmosphere and the wide sweep of the dashboard has enough interest to stop it becoming boring.

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In Excel specification, the TS comes extremely well equipped (for close on £30,000 you would expect it) including dual-zone automatic air conditioning, heated front seats, part leather upholstery, front and rear parking sensors, intelligent park assist, rain sensing wipers and an eight inch touch screen to control many of the Corolla's infotainment functions as part of the Tour 2 and Go set-up.



On the Road

Having established a comfortable position it's now time to try out the performance which is generated by the combination of Toyota's faithful, but recently refreshed, 1.8 litre four cylinder in-line petrol engine (built in North Wales) and a 53kW electric front motor linked to a 56 module lithium-ion battery pack.



On paper the Corolla TS isn't that quick, but the hybrid system that allows you to pull away on battery power with maximum torque is very responsive over the first hundred yards or so, even if the petrol engine is no ball of fire.

In operation the combination feels a lot quicker than the bare statistics would suggest, it is excellent for a quick getaway in traffic and then settles down to a sustained, if



unspectacular performance.

Power is fed through an electric CVT transmission with the options of full EV mode indicated by a green EV icon (although you can't maintain that for very long or at higher speeds and it quickly uses up the battery reserves with hard use), Eco mode for most situations and a Power mode when an extra burst of energy is required.

To get the most out of the hybrid system requires a gentle use of the accelerator and judicious braking to recharge the batteries for maximum efficiency – it may not be the most exciting driving experience but one that can be rewarded with greater economy.



One of the best features of the Corolla is that it foregoes the quirky power election lever found on other Toyota hybrids for a more conventional fore and aft automatic style gear



stick that makes selection much easier.

The relatively conventional MacPherson front and compact multi-link double wishbone rear suspension is well up to the task, assisted by new shock absorbers, and in combination with the generous wheelbase and a low centre of gravity (partly created by the low position of the lighter and smaller engine) provides a comfortable ride that has just enough of a sporting nature to reward the press-on driver.

Getting the Corolla pointed in the right direction is no chore thanks to the assisted steering which has a light touch at low speeds and firms up as the speed increases. It may not be the most dynamic sensation available but it has a good compromise in feedback to the driver.

Even with its bulk, the Corolla feels assured under a braking system that features ABS with EBD and Brake Assist plus the added reassurance of Vehicle Stability Control, Traction Control, Pre-collision system with pedestrian protection, Lane Departure Assist, and there is even a Road Sign Assist system.

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Verdict

Having driven several models from the current Toyota range in recent months I have to say that this is the one that I would select.

It has an attractive combination of generous passenger accommodation, contemporary looks, modest yet reassured performance and handling, good fuel economy and environmental credentials, plus it's British built.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Toyota Corolla Touring Sport Excel 1.8 hybrid

Engine: 1,798cc four-cylinder petrol

Electric motor: 53Kw

Transmission: Electric CVT

Power: 120 bhp (system total)



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Torque: 142 Nm (105 lb.ft) @ 3,600rpm (engine) / 163 Nm or 120 lb.ft (electric motor)

Performance

0-62 mph: 11.1 seconds

Top Speed: 112 mph

Fuel Consumption (WLTP Figures):

Combined: 55.42 - 65.94 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 83 g/km

Price (On the Road): £29,945