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Toyota Corolla Excel 2.0 Hatchback – Road Test

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When the world's best selling car gets a significant makeover, you have to take a serious look at the Toyota Corolla, writes Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales).

Launched in 1966, the Corolla became the best selling car in the world eight years later, overtaking the Beetle in 1997 for total sales and in 2021 went on to exceed 50 million models, being made in ten countries.

It was also the platform for the Daihatsu Charmant from 1974 to late 1980s, built in Japan, and since 2020, the Suzuki Swace is a cheaper version of the Corolla and is made in Burnaston, Derby assembly plant for European markets.

Between 2007 and 2018 the Corolla name was replaced by the Auris nomenclature but it did not prove a popular move and the current 12th generation Corolla hatchback, and touring sports models entered showrooms in 2019. Last year the Corolla was refreshed with a new interior makeover including a 12.3-inch driver's screen replacing the original 8-inch unit, Smart Connect+ multi-media and an extensive range of dynamic and passive safety systems and driver aids which are future-proofed with over the air updates possible. It is supported by completely new electrical wiring under the skin.

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There's a choice of Deeside-built 1.8 litre engines or Polish-built 2.0 litre units, both self-charging fifth generation hybrids fitted with cvt automatic gearboxes and slightly different ratios in Icon, Design, GR sport and Excel trim



levels, in two bodystyles from just under £30,800 to over £38,000.

The test car was fitted with a £1,000 full-length glass sunroof and finished in premium paint for another £950 which are included in our price in the technical panel. Our Excel trim includes blind spot monitor, rear cross traffic alert and auto braking using radar as well as safe exit assist to alert emerging driver of passing vehicles or cyclists. There is also leather upholstery, intelligent LED headlights, head-up display and JBL premium audio system.

That's enough of the showroom spittle, what's it like to drive?

Very good, in a few words. The coil spring front suspension and rear multi-link set up keep everything well planted on the road thanks to a lowered centre of gravity, with revised smooth, progressive and easy steering, strong brakes and good pickup if you keep it in the sport mode as opposed to normal or miserly eco setting from gearlever and console switch.

Over our 600 miles test we switched between settings depending on roads and traffic conditions and were pleasantly surprised by an overall fuel consumption above 60 mpg. Many times it hovered close to 53 mpg but longer trips lifted this easily.

The e-cvt box performed very smoothly once it got going but there always seemed to be an initial hesitancy irrespective of selected mode.

The 2.0 litre petrol engine has been tuned to promote smoothness and economy over performance and the electric motor gives it a much needed lift



when required.

The two work seamlessly together and because it's a self-charging system there is nothing to plug in and you can simply depress the ev-mode button in town to stretch that economy as far as possible. It might do 42 miles on its traction battery, so long as you keep down speed.

Secondary controls grouped on stalks and wheel-spokes were close to fingers and worked well with some other switches on the right of the fascia or grouped under the central infotainment screen. The big display was very easy to read, quick responding to touch and comprehensive in content.

Supporting this was the main enlarged display ahead of the driver which could be changed to show desired operations and also the Excel's head up imaging proved convenient and clear too.

There were a lot of outlet vents to the climate control and it proved flexible, quick changing and remarkably quiet operating.

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I was less appreciative of the oddments' room in what is generally considered a family car. The compartments in doors were very tight, the console had just two cup-holders and a small bin with seatback pockets in the rear.

Rear seat passengers also had limited legroom when the front pair were positioned for two six-foot occupants and the car's USB-C ports are not compatible for all systems and there was no alternative provision.



Access was reasonable throughout and the loadbed had a well shaped and convenient height but I suspect many will fold down the seatbacks to take many items other than weekend shopping.

I liked the curved backs to the front seats, the cushions' support and the supporting bolsters with adequate adjustment range for occupants of various shapes and sizes. The flatter rear seats still offered comfort.

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Visibility was reasonably good all round but we appreciated the passive alerts for approaching hazards and the very clear reversing camera, big wipers, strong washers and very bright self-dipping headlights.

A lot of unseen work has gone into making the platform, steering and suspension stiffer to improve handling and it has also reduced the vibration and noise but it has made the ride a bit firmer, particularly over potholes and raised iron works or speed bumps.

It is not uncomfortable thanks to the seating and spring rates but you are aware of poor surfaces beneath.

VERDICT

With all the technical improvements put into the MY25 Toyota Corolla Excel I think the owner of a previous generation model will be impressed and it is certain to win over owners from rival brands because it feels well made and drives economically and smoothly.



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From the kerb it oozes world appeal.

For: Easy to drive, smooth engine and transmission, very economical, comfortable front seats, well equipped

Against: Modest boot when seats in use, some road noise, not universal power plug-ins, limited rear legroom and shortage of oddments space.



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FAST FACTS

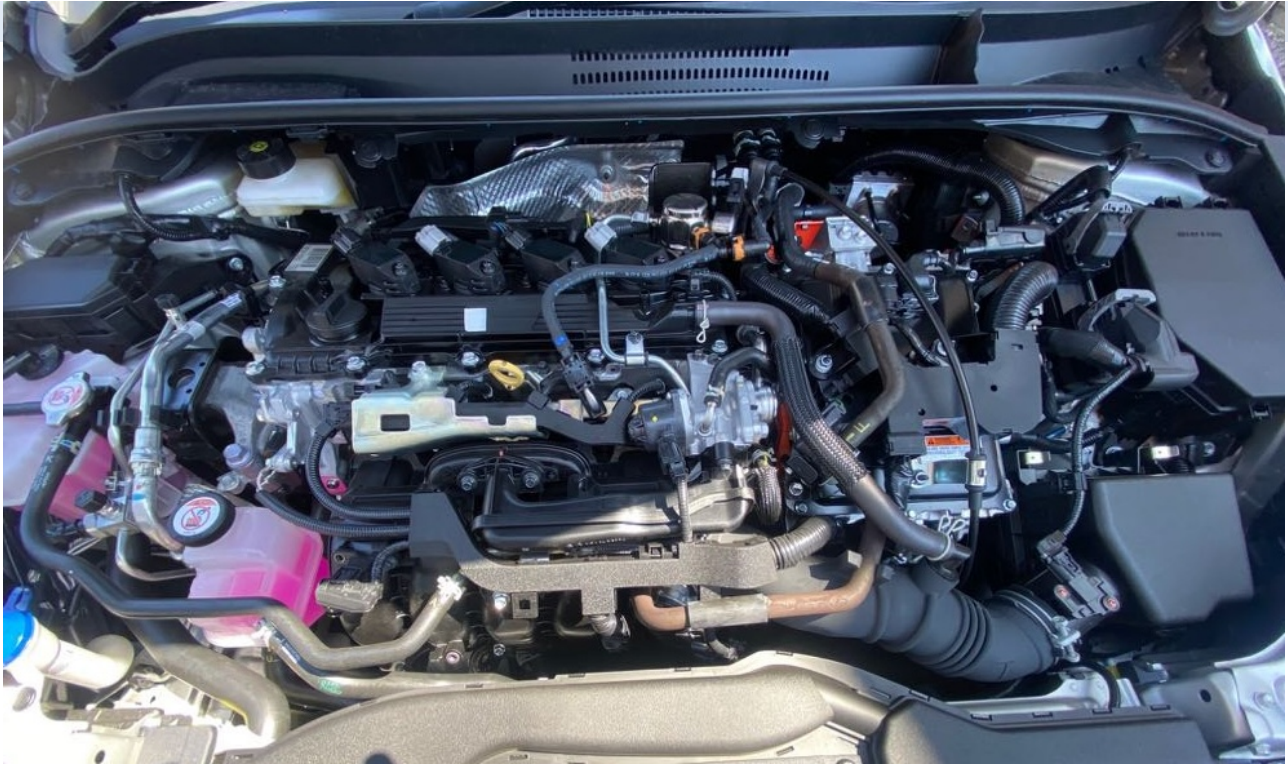
Model: Toyota Corolla Excel 2.0 Hatchback



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Price: £36,295 inc. options

Mechanical: 176 bhp 1987cc 4 cyl petrol-hybrid, e-CVT

Max Speed: 112 mph

0 - 62 mph: 7.4 secs

Combined MPG: 60.3

Insurance Group: 22E

C02 emissions: 107 g/km

Bik rating: 27%, £390FY, £195SR



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Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles to 10 years/ 100,000 miles

Size: L 4.37 m (14.34 ft), W 1.79 m (5.87 ft), H 1.46 m (4.79 ft)

Bootspace: 313 to 1,052 litres (11.05 to 37.15 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,485 kg (3,274 lb)

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