Toyota RAV4 Plug-in GR Sport – Road Test

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“Better late than never is probably what you can say about the impressive Toyota RAV4 PHEV”, advises Robin Roberts (and

WheelsWithinWales).

We have always been fans of the Toyota RAV4 but when it launched the petrol-hybrid in 2016 we bemoaned the fact there was no plug-in derivative to improve emissions when other manufacturers were putting them into showrooms.

So, Toyota has been slow to roll out its PHEV RAV4, but it has wisely used the eight years and come up with what is probably the best of this type.

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It is very eco-friendly, starting in EV mode every time and has a 46 miles battery range, pushing regenerated electricity back into the battery very efficiently and also using an electric motor on each pair of wheels to give four-wheel-drive traction while also having the capability to tow 1.5 tonnes.

The highly sophisticated on-board powertrain and hybrid system has a 6.6 kW charger which means it takes about 2.5 hrs on a standard 7 kW home point to reach full potential. It also comes with a cable and three-pin plug if needed.

The RAV4 range is a mixture of petrol-hybrid 2WD and 4WD models in Design, Excel and GR Sport trims, and begin at just under £39,900 rising to £46,815, while the new PHEV versions in Design or GR Sport grades with intelligent 4WD only go from £44,175 and £48,990.

As we reviewed the latest RAV4 PHEV, Toyota was offering some very tempting incentives with a sizeable deposit contribution and under 2% interest on a PCP, so it’s worth asking about any current offers when thinking of acquiring a new model.

Using the familiar 2.5 litre petrol engine – there is no diesel version any more – and electric motors at each end in the PHEV model, there is a lot of useful combined power when you need it and clever software at a driver’s fingertips to extract the best method of movement.



Starting in electric mode by default it will run to 46 miles, but the system analyses a driving style and with gentle acceleration and braking which puts electricity back into the power box, we saw this indicated distance rise to 49 miles on one journey. So you get out only what you put in.

Keeping it in EV-hybrid mode by selecting the button beside the gear lever is probably the best option for most.

This still permits it to shift into EV mode when it's the best time or you can fine tune the set up and hold EV, or choose eco, normal and sport settings as desired on a rotary control. There's an additional button for off-road Trail use when maximum traction is required.

The petrol engine cuts in smoothly and pulls well once underway with brisk acceleration in the sport mode and it soon hits the legal maximum. The car cruises with a lot of composure on main roads and motorways but the top speed is not excessive, particularly if doing a lot of miles abroad on holiday.

Engine noise remains in the background and becomes more intrusive as speed rises with some road rumbles accompanying it. Other mechanical sounds and wind wuffle are low.

The CVT transmission is very smooth from the time of easy selection onwards and it permits the engine power to be smoothly delivered and combined with the motors' power to give excellent traction and handling on road.

Steering is nicely balanced between assistance and feedback, the turning circle is good and brakes are powerful with rapid build-up underfoot. Electric parking brake buttons hold it well on hills or in traffic, ready to move off with gentle throttle pressure.

The secondary controls split over wheelspokes, fascia, console and 10.5-inch touchscreen worked well once familiarised and the Toyota Smart Connect quickly linked to mobile phones.


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AUTO
DUAL
A/C
POWER
PUSH
NORMAL
TRAIL

The RAV4 PHEV comes with intelligent speed control, stability assist and sensors to aid parking and keep a safe distance from vehicles ahead, together with a reversing camera utilising dynamic guidelines for easy placement.

The heating and ventilation system offered a wide temperature range, precise output flow and directional control, and was backed up with four powered windows but no sunroof.

Visibility was quite good to front and sides, more restricted over the shoulder and through the back window but it comes with heated and powered door mirrors and very good wash and wipers front and back.

Access was very good with a powered tailgate and large boot behind a low sill, offset split rear seatbacks to gradually increase capacity and near but not quite 90-degree opening doors.



Inside, the seats were deeply padded and supporting, took five with ease and plenty of room, and the front pair had a wide adjustment range. The driver also has a reasonable column adjustment to fine-tune the steering set up.

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Ride comfort was good for an SUV with AWD ability. Body sway was very well controlled, pitch and dip were virtually non-existent and it was never upset by potholes or speed bumps.

VERDICT

Living with the RAV4 PHEV is a very easy existence, demanding little from a driver but offering a lot in return.

It's list price is a possibly a bit higher than rivals depending on the deal you can drive, but there is a lot of advanced technology underneath and ability which you may never test to extreme, but it's there nevertheless.

Unfortunately, the list price is what determines the road tax figures and it easily breaches the limits for five-years use, which is fine if it's a company purchase but hurts if it's a private buy.

Only Toyota can act to cut this cost to buyers and might be something they could consider, but sooner than it took them to introduce the RAV4 PHEV please.

For: Sophisticated and mechanically very refined, economical, comfortable, good range, potentially cheap to run.

Against: Average performance, some engine and road noise, expensive to buy and OTR price puts it into higher renewing tax band.



FAST FACTS

Model: Toyota RAV4 PHEV GR Sport


GR
SPORT
PLUG-IN
HYBRID
AWD-i

Price: £49,665

Mechanical: 182 bhp 4 cyl 2.5 litre petrol engine and 174 kW motors, CVT, AWD

Max Speed: 112 mph

0 – 62 mph: 6.0 secs

Combined MPG: 48 mpg petrol / 46 miles EV

Insurance Group: 37E

C02 emissions: 22 g/km

Bik rating: 8%, £ZeroFY, £590SRx5

Warranty: 3 years/ 60K to 10yrs/ 100K

Size: L 4.60 m (15.09 ft), W 1.86 m (6.10 ft), H 1.69 m (5.54 ft)

Bootspace: 520 to 1,604 litres (18.36 to 56.64 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,995 kg (4,398 lb)

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