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Toyota Yaris GR Sport – Road Test

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The Toyota Yaris GR Sport Hybrid put through its paces by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency)...

Toyota dominated this year's World Rally Championship with their WRC GR Yaris Hybrid and some of this success will promote their sophisticated small car, the Yaris GR Sport Hybrid 5-door hatchback variant. This is not to be confused with the turbocharged 257 bhp



GR Yaris 3-door which is actually more of a rally replica model.

Toyota launched the Yaris GR Sport about 12 months ago and my test drive really took me back far more than a year ago, to a time when hot-hatchbacks were all the rage and any car which had a rally or racing pedigree was guaranteed to be a winner on a Monday after a competition on Sunday.

But of course, times change and you can no longer just rely on performance per pound to pull in the punters, you have to deliver something different.



The Yaris in fact is now in its fourth generation with first models arriving in 1999. Prices today range from £22,110 to £25,070 with Icon, Design, GR Sport and Excel spec levels but



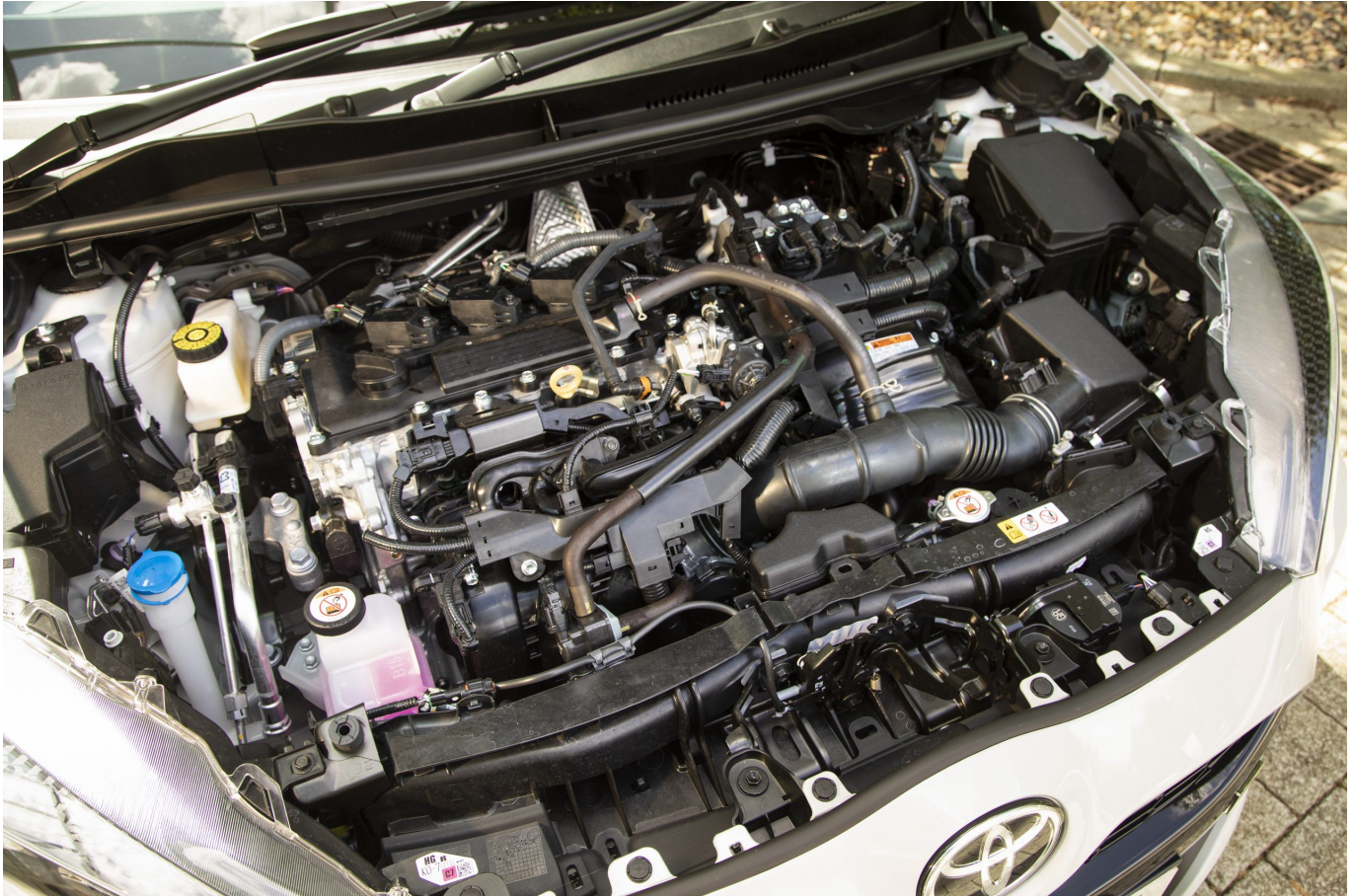
all with the same 1.5-litre petrol/hybrid 114 bhp power unit and e-CVT automatic transmission. The hard core GR Yaris costs £32,110 to £35,610 depending on the option pack levels.

The Yaris GR Sport Hybrid has retuned suspension for enthusiastic engagement, bespoke 18-inch wheels and decals, unique Dynamic Grey paint and inside has red stitched cloth seats, wheel and gear knob, with optional seat heaters.

The harder edge to this Yaris does not mean a driver has to suffer in silence because it also gets a useful package of smartphone/ integrated music, multi-media with eight-inch screen, a host of safety features with many airbags, with LED lights front and back.

The test car also had the £915 optional two-tone paint with a black roof section over the grey painted bodywork.

The Yaris GR Sport's 1.5 litre petrol/hybrid engine would not disgrace a hot hatchback from the 1970s or 1980s but it would leave it standing for its economy, low emissions and general refinement, which are all very good in today's market.



The triple-cylinder motor is very refined and smooth, and you'd never think it wasn't a four-cylinder unit unless you expected a lot of flexibility and minimum gear-changing.

It needs to be driven, to be exploited, to bring out its best feature and that 114 bhp total power output with hybrid assist is really enjoyable and very smooth, mostly quiet until you hit high revs and was always unbelievably economical. We checked the consumption a few times and it always indicated the low 60 mpg mark overall.

In common with all Toyota's hybrid engines, this petrol hybrid uses the Atkinson cycle design which keeps the intake valves open for longer, delaying the compression stroke. This improves efficiency and fuel economy.



The new engine has a maximum output of 90 bhp/68 kW with a peak 120 Nm (89 lb.ft) of torque delivered at lower revs (3,600 rpm). Total power output with the electric motors is 114 bhp. The transmission is an e-CVT automatic – an electric continuously variable transmission.

The hybrid system has two motor/generators – MG1 and MG2. MG2 is linked to the front wheels and can be used as the power source to drive the vehicle at times. MG1 is deployed to start the engine and to generate power to charge both batteries (hybrid lithium-ion and 12V).

Having enjoyed the engine's performance the Yaris GR Sport Hybrid can also be driven with a lot of restraint and then the hatchback's refinement really kicks in and you can enjoy the sound system, connectivity and controls. Everything comes to hand very sensibly, the secondary controls have a satisfying squeeze action, the gear lever was short and direct, the brakes very powerful and balanced while the steering imparted excellent input and feedback.

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Heating and ventilation only had a modest job to do in the small cabin and it was highly effective backed up by powered front windows. Oddments space was a bit short throughout and the boot capacity would take only a couple of weekend bags without having to drop the rear seatbacks.



Room in front was good so long as you were not over six feet and then the adjustment range might be challenging. Access to the back was a bit of a wiggle with a small opening to the rear doors and once inside the legroom was tight for anyone over average height and best left to children.

The seats were of the usual very high Toyota quality, deep and supporting throughout, but they struggled to absorb bad bumps which bypassed the stiffer sports suspension abilities.

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Roadholding was excellent with control of the system to reduce wheel-lift and body roll while keeping the driver firmly in control through twisting turns. There were no bad habits evident.

The poorer surfaces did generate quite a bit of noise under the 18-inch tyres and the extended engine note added to this but thankfully other mechanical and wind noises were very low.



VERDICT

The Toyota Yaris GR Sport Hybrid harks back maybe 30 years but it is also a modern fun hatchback using hybrid technology for today's roads.



For: Very agile handling with good roadholding, easy to drive, extremely economical, excellent controls, well equipped.

Against: Poor rear legroom and small bootspace, a lot of road noise, some engine noise when extended, average ride quality.

Robin adds: **Merry Christmas** and a **safe driving New Year**.

FAST FACTS

Toyota Yaris GR Sport Hybrid

Price: £24,420

Mechanical: 114 bhp 1490cc 3 cyl petrol hybrid, automatic

Max Speed: 109 mph

0 - 62 mph: 9.7 sec

Combined MPG: 63

Insurance Group: 14E

CO2 emissions: 99 g/km

Tax costs: Bik rating 24%, VED £140FY, £155SR

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

Size: L 3.94 m (12.93 ft), W 1.75 m (5.76 ft), H 1.50 m (4.92 ft)



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Bootspace: 286 litres (10.10 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,120 kg (2,469 lb)