

Goldilocks option by Joe Sage

TRD—Toyota Racing Development—is best known for track performance builds and modifications and, especially in the case of the 4Runner and pickups, off-road performance models, to the extreme. Not unlike several other manufacturers' performance sub-badges, notably the Germans, here Toyota is applying it to more of a style and options package, though it does include mild performance upgrades. Mostly, it's an attractive new build within the reliably solid 4Runner lineup overall.

Introduced in mid-2021 as a 2022 model, the new 4Runner TRD Sport—one of four trim levels, out of eight total, available with either rear- or four-wheel drive (ours is a 4x4)—is a new combination of style and stance, with enhanced on-road suspen-

sion as found on the notably pricier Limited trim.

TRD Sport stands moderately tall atop 20-inch wheels, though it forgoes the beefy rock-absorbing sidewalls of a TRD Pro atop 17-inch wheels. Its hood scoop identifies it immediately as a member of the TRD family. Our sample, in this year's distinctive Lunar Rock paint, is all the more evocative of the off-road 4Runners. But it's more aimed at daily driving and road handling.

We did plenty of both of those during our week with the vehicle, with some decent four-wheeling thrown in for good measure.

4Runner puts a smile on our face with some of our favorite controls in any vehicle: simple, stylish, and most of all rugged knobs for the transfer case

selector, climate and various functions around the screen. They're all big enough, extend far enough, and are textured with grooves and rubberized edges—easy to operate with gloves on.

That in itself was enough to suggest a drive up to Flagstaff or maybe the Grand Canyon, with snow in the forecast along with some single-digit temperatures at the Canyon. We could also check out that road-hugging suspension on the twisties through I-17's dramatic elevation gains.

At almost 5000 pounds, with generally bricklike aerodynamics, moderate horsepower and a venerable five-speed automatic, we might not have expected a noteworthy highway cruise, but we would have been wrong. The 4Runner climbed just fine, perhaps without a lot more power to spare, but we never needed any more than we had, holding our own with the rest of the always competitive and

aggressive traffic through Black Canyon.

What we really came to appreciate was that five-speed transmission. It shifted well, right when needed, and tangibly—which got us to thinking about all the 10-speed-and-such transmissions in play now. Their job isn't to pull Black Canyon, but rather to shift more often in routine driving, to be more fuel-efficient. Those are a heck of an engineering feat, but as a driving experience, they can arguably start to feel as though they are always hunting for gears—smoother, but with sort of an uncertain undercurrent. Anybody who's been driving more than a couple of years is familiar with the active feel of fewer gears. With 4Runner's five-speed, each shift felt like just what we needed.

Skies had cleared, but we hit our first snow on the ground above 5000 feet, heavier above 6000 feet. Time to leave the pavement behind. For this type of off-roading, the tire and wheel size are not as important—those tall sidewalls on a TRD Pro are for flexing the impact from bouldering and rock

crawling. And its relatively narrow tires are a plus here—better to dig for a firm surface than to float and slide atop the snow. Ours was equipped with Yokohama Geolander All/Terrains, not the boldest off-roading tread, but a solid combination for exactly this model's mission—highway cruising and daily use, with some tough stuff mixed in.

Toward the lower end of the full lineup's price range, the TRD Sport is not super highly featured. And that's the point. With a degree of SR5 affordability, a degree of TRD off-road-worthiness and a degree of Limited road-handling, it may be none of those, but it delivers key points of all of them. 4Runner's distinctive persona seems best illuminated by the top-dollar off-road end, but many buyers (who otherwise might be looking at, say, the Highlander) want that glow—and some of that capability—in a more conventional and/or more affordable build. It's not about what it is not; it's about what it is. And this is exactly what the new 4Runner TRD Sport delivers. ■



SPECIFICATIONS (TRD SPORT)

ASSEMBLY	.....Tahara, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE	.....4.0L alum/alum EFI 24v DOHC V6
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....10.4:1
HP/TORQUE	.....270 hp / 278 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....5-spd ECT auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....part time 4x4
TORQUE SPLIT	.....40/60 straight line; turning (front wheel spin) 30/70; turning (rear wheel spin) 53/47
SUSPENSION	.....F: coils, indep dbl-wishbone, 1.22" stblzr bar; R: coils, 4-link rigid, 1.18" stblzr bar
STEERING	.....pwr assist var gear rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 13.3 vented; R: 12.3 vented
WHEELS	.....20x7.5
TIRES	.....Yokohama Geolander G96 P245/60R20
TRACK	.....63.2
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....190.2 / 109.8 in
HEIGHT	.....w roof rails 71.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....37.4 ft
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	.....33 / 26°
ROWS / SEATS	.....2-row / 5-psngr (opt 3/7)
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....39.3 / 38.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.7 / 32.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....47.2 / 89.7 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....9.6 in
WEIGHT	.....TRD Sport not stated; overall lineup (4x4) 4675-4805 lb
PAYLOAD / GVWR	.....TRD Sport not stated; overall lineup (4x4) 1495-1625 / 6300 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....87 oct unl reg / 23.0 gal
MPG	.....16/19/17 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$42,025
PREMIUM AUDIO	.....8-in touchscreen, 8 speakers, dynamic nav (3-yr trial), safety connect (1-yr trial), wifi (up to 2GB for 3-mo trial), destination assist (1-yr trial).....1585
TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE	.....1310
ALL-WEATHER MATS/CARGO TRAY	.....269
PROMOTION: "Keep It Wild" savings	.....(500)
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1215
TOTAL	.....\$45,904

2022 TOYOTA 4RUNNER LINEUP

All have 4.0L V6 / 5-spd auto	4x2	4x4
SR5	\$37,605	\$39,480
SR5 Premium	41,015	42,890
TRD Sport	40,450	42,325
Limited	47,190	49,225
Trail Edition	41,450	
TRD Off-Road	41,435	
TRD Off-Road Premium	44,380	
TRD Pro	50,745	

Note: our sticker's base varied slightly from this.