

Dirt first, and a champ in town

BY JOE SAGE

Toyota 4Runner often divides people into two camps. Naysayers say, "They haven't changed this thing in years," while fans and enthusiasts say, "Don't ever change!" If you're in the love-it-just-like-it-is group (as we are, at least till the next one), you will be very happy again this year.

4Runner always puts a smile on our face, from burly instrument knobs you can operate with your gloves on (as it should be, for a winter and rough weather-ready off-roader) to its manual transfer case (there is also a full-time unit available).

4Runner has been with us from a 1984 model introduced in 1983 to this 2023 model introduced in 2022. The current vehicle is just its fifth generation, out since 2009 as a 2010 model.

Relativities abound. 4Runner is one of eight basic Toyota SUVs or crossovers (eleven, if you break out hybrids), but one of only two body-on-frame util-

ities, the other being the big three-row Sequoia. As such, 4Runner and Sequoia have more commonality with the Tacoma and Tundra pickups than with other utilities in the lineup. (Frustratingly for some, Tacoma does offer a manual transmission, while 4Runner does not.) These are also the only four Toyotas available in TRD Pro fitment. And this is where our sample 4Runner's soul and magic lie.

Every 2023 4Runner bears the same 270-horsepower 4.0-liter V6 (a smaller 4-cylinder, 2WD-only, and a bigger V8 have gone by the wayside in recent years), while the V6 has been improved for power and fuel efficiency along the way.

In line with this durable vehicle's durable execution, there are only two new things for 2023—the bold Solar Octane paint on our sample (only available on TRD Pro) and a 40th Anniversary Special Edition trim (based on SR5 Premium).

We already knew the 4Runner is bigger on presence, grunt and purpose than on perky acceleration, exactly as intended. This was all the more apparent this time, at first, as we came to it straight from a series of very quick and responsive EVs.

However, that drastic difference was only really obvious the first time out, then becoming kind of a distant memory. Years in this kind of vehicle probably creates a lot of mental and motor memory. Impromptu EV comparison aside, 4Runner is simply strong and capable. While we planned to head for the hills, in town it kept up with our notoriously aggressive traffic, tracked accurately on freeways, was tight in U-turns and handy to park. On top of that, it has the kind of style and draws the kind of admiration that make it just as impressive a standout at the office or club as any luxury alternative.

As for those hills, we gave the 4Runner TRD Pro



a solid drive off-pavement, as we have done with this model many times before, and as always it was a champ. Included were rough dirt and rock two-tracks, some fading away to just a trace, with steep drop-offs along some stretches, and deeply rutted and washed out gravel climbs, all in 4HI via that manual transfer case. To turn around at the top, we shifted to 4LO and backed straight up a steep rim spot to get pointed back downhill.

No reasonable person would argue with the 4Runner's basic perfection for its purposes. If you just can't live without considerably more oomph

from the powertrain, one solution could be the next vehicle we drove (also in this issue)—the 437-hp three-row, body-on-frame Sequoia, about a foot and a half longer and also available as a TRD Pro. Its smaller but twin-turbocharged V6 even has higher fuel mileage ratings. On the other hand, stepping away from TRD Pro, the full Sequoia lineup, all high-end, starts at over \$60,000, while the 4Runner starts in the top \$30s. Apples and oranges are everywhere, but for its particular combination of style, strength, purpose and price, the 4Runner still stands its ground. What's not to love? ■



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Tahara, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE	4.0L 6-cyl 24v DOHC TDI, EFI, LEV-II, alum alloy block/head
HP/TORQUE	270 hp / 278 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.4:1
TRANSMISSION	5-spd ECT auto
DRIVETRAIN	4x4: part-time 4WD system w Active TRAC; locking rear differential
SUSPENSION	F: coil spring indep dbi-wishbone w stblzr bar; R: coil spring 4-link rigid type w stblzr bar
STEERING	pwr-asst var rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 13.3 vented; R: 12.3 vented
WHEELS	17x7.0 black TRD alloy
TIRES	P265/70 R17 all-terrain
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	191.3 / 109.8 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	9.6 in
APPRCH / DEPART	33 / 26°
TURNING CIRCLE	37.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	39.3 / 38.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.7 / 32.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	47.2 / 89.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4750 lb
PAYLOAD / GVWR	1550 / 6300 lb
TOW CAPACITY	5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	87 oct reg / 23.0 gal
MPG	16/19/17 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$53,270
PAINT: Solar Octane	425
SLIDING REAR CARGO DECK	350
DESTINATION CHARGE	1335
TOTAL	\$55,380

2023 TOYOTA 4RUNNER LINEUP

	RWD	4x4
SR5	\$38,805	\$40,680
SR5 Premium	41,865	43,740
TRD Sport	41,665	43,540
TRD Off-Road		42,650
TRD Off-Road Premium		45,230
40th Anniversary 4x4		46,370
Limited	48,040	50,075
TRD Pro		53,270

4RUNNER TRD PROGRESSION

- TRD Sport (the only TRD in either 4x2 or 4x4) builds off the SR5, adding hood scoop, badging, color-keyed bumpers and body details, black roof rails, X-REAS suspension and 20-inch wheels.
- TRD Off-Road 4x4 moves to 17-in wheels.
- TRD Off-Road Premium 4x4 adds keyless entry/start and power tilt/slide moonroof with sunshade.
- TRD Pro 4x4 beefs up off-roading with 2.5-inch Fox internal bypass shocks front and rear with rear piggyback reservoir, TRD-tuned front springs, TRD cat-back exhaust, TRD roof rack, 1/4-inch TRD front skid plate with red lettering, 17-inch matte black flow-formed TRD alloy wheels with Nitto Terra Grappler A/T tires, its own TOYOTA grille, and black TRD Pro badging.