

Market geniuses BY JOE SAGE

The spacious brand new 2023 Toyota Crown sedan bears a name with long Toyota heritage. Born in 1955, it hasn't been sold in the US since 1972, though (less known) its flagship status has been the basis for several Crown-derivative Toyota model names all along—Corona and Corolla (from Latin), Camry (from Japanese kanmuri), even Avalon (a stretch to King Arthur). Now Toyota Crown itself is back with us, in generation sixteen.

Toyota dances lightly around tying the Crown, decidedly a sedan, to crossover or SUV leanings—which had caught our eye favorably, with a notably high beltline, visually high rocker panel and mildly extended roofline—but they do mention its taller

driving position and easy step-in access in those terms, and its approach and departure angles are in its basic specs. We can easily see the car's appeal, not only to thirsty buyers in a currently highly neglected sedan segment, but to anyone liking its fastback SUV styling with the security and organizational pluses of a sedan's locking trunk.

Call it what you will, it's a knockout. From inside it's spacious, from outside it signals strength and power, and it's handsome from all around.

Three versions run \$39,950 to \$52,350, all hybrids and all all-wheel-drive. Top price brings you not only Platinum trim but an increase from 236 to 340 hp with its MAX powertrain. Pick your pleas-

ure: fuel mileage in the 40s on two standard-engine trims (with a zero-to-60 time of 7.6 seconds), or zero-to-60 in 5.7 seconds in Platinum MAX (with fuel mileage still running into the 30s). Our 236-hp Crown Limited sits in the middle, at \$45,550.

We set out for a nearby freeway, starting with that familiar double-lane merging turn as soon as the light turns green (reminiscent of NASCAR since they relocated the starting line to just before the first turn.) This is the slower powertrain, yet it is quick. Torque is so immediate, it reminded us of acceleration in an EV bearing double the horsepower—not numerical fact, but impression, which can be just as important, and it's fun. And while an EV runs silently, the Crown has a satisfying growl.

The two non-turbo versions do have a CVT, an electronic unit, with its own growl less satisfying in

some situations, such as long uphill acceleration on a mountain highway. Note that the turbo MAX version has a direct-shift six-speed automatic.

One of the last Detroit luxury sedans still on the road came from behind on another freeway ramp, an uphill, but couldn't beat our acceleration. Our Toyota Crown held its own here not just in competitive performance, but in its general style and experience. We could think of no reason we'd rather be in that. Crown starts to be a solid match to premium European sedans, too, and at maybe about 60 percent the typical price.

Anecdotally (as opposed to by hypermiling), we realized we had driven a couple of hundreds miles, aggressively in town and on rural four-lane highways, yet saw we had used only about an eighth of a tank of gas. The 41 mpg rating seems honest.

We often drive one version of a vehicle, with a

mention of its alternate versions sufficing. In the case of Toyota Crown, we are curious to give the turbo-plus-automatic MAX an extended drive. The two are a strong pairing, both very compelling.

Some years back, one of the Detroit automakers was introducing a replacement for their long-running big sedan, early in the looming trend. We asked what they'd do to keep their legions of devoted owners. "Where are they gonna go?" was the confident reply. Seems now they can go to Toyota.

Toyota has built what such buyers want, as they leverage their longstanding electrified powertrain leadership into a measured approach to evolution, while delivering vehicles people want. If you are one of many who miss the large sedan category, abandoned now by nearly all, this may be just what you're looking for, particularly if not on a luxe budget. Hats off to Toyota for recognizing this. ■

With so many manufacturers currently shunning the sedan market, might we see Toyota—a well-established member of the NASCAR trio—make a move to conquer the highly desirable law enforcement market, itself a huge endorsement of strength, function and performance, with a new Crown Police Cruiser?



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Toyota, Aichi, Japan
CLASS / SEATS	midsize sedan / five
ENGINE	2.5L Dynamic Force 4-cylinder, 16v DOHC w VVT-iE and VVT-i, dir ignition
COMPRESSION RATIO	14.0:1
HP/TORQUE	184 hp / 163 lb-ft
ELEC MOTOR	perm magnet synchronous
BATTERY	Ni-metal hydride 230.4V, 5.0 Ah
TORQUE (F/R)	149 / 89 lb-ft
COMBINED SYSTEM NET	326 hp / 400.4 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	electronic CVT
DRIVETRAIN	electronic on-demand AWD
0-TO-60 MPH	7.6 sec
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut w 26.5mm hollow stblzr bar; R: multi-link w 21.0mm hollow stblzr bar
STEERING	rack parallel elec power
BRAKES	F: 12.9 in vented; R: 12.5 in solid
WHEELS	(std) 19-in multi-spoke machined two-tone alloy; (as outfitted) 21-in 10-spoke dark metallic alloy
TIRES	(std) 225/55R19; (as outfitted) 225/45R21
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	196.1 / 112.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.8 in
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	13.9 / 19.3°
TURNING CIRCLE	38.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.2 / 37.5 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.1 / 38.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	15.2 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3980 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY87 reg or higher / 14.5 gal
MPG	42/41/41 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$45,550
PREMIUM PAINT: Supersonic Red	425
ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY PKG: 21-in 10-spoke dark metallic alloy wheels, panoramic view monitor, remote connect w digital key capability (4G; trial or subscrip req'd)	2950
DESTINATION CHARGE	1095
TOTAL	\$50,020

2023 TOYOTA CROWN LINEUP

(All are Hybrid AWD w diff size front/rear motors)

2.5L Dynamic Force 4-cyl, Electronic CVT	
XLE	236 hp net \$39,950
Limited	236 hp net 45,550
2.4L turbo 4-cyl, Direct Shift 6-spd auto	
Platinum MAX	340 hp net 52,350