

2018 Toyota Yaris iA: The Sport Sedan Surprise

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The Toyota Yaris iA, added to the lineup last year, has been making a name for itself as the subcompact with class-above (or two classes-above) driving dynamics, safety technology, and premium features. It's also an amazing value.

Can a car that has an MSRP below \$16,000 rightly be called a sport sedan? The 2018 Toyota Yaris iA answers in the affirmative. Beneath the daringly curved sheet metal lies a tight, agile machine that re-defines "entry level." A high-strength body structure, quick-revving, high-compression 1.5-liter engine with 106 horsepower; choice of 6-speed manual or 6-speed automatic transmissions; and standard 16-inch alloy wheels make the Yaris iA quite appealing to driving enthusiasts. It's also a combination that can make a driving enthusiast out of someone who was just looking for affordable, reliable A-to-B transportation. Getting a 7-inch multimedia system with voice recognition is another surprise in the class.

For all customers, the standard Low-speed Pre-collision safety system is a standout feature, unexpected in this price class but part of Toyota's strategy to have automatic emergency braking standard on nearly all its models by the end of 2017. Anyone buying a small sedan expects big fuel economy numbers, and the Yaris iA delivers with 32 city/40 highway /35 combined EPA-estimated mpg when equipped with an automatic transmission, and 30 city/39 highway/34 combined mpg when a manual gearbox is selected.

The Yaris iA's striking profile certainly stands out in a crowd, and that is complimented by an eye-catching hexagon lower front grille and sharp-eyed headlights. In the rear, the spacious trunk gives Yaris iA a distinctive look in the segment. A standard 60/40-split rear seat easily expands carrying capacity and versatility.

Upscale piano black bumper treatment, chrome grille surround, and chrome tailpipe are other unexpected details for this segment. The color choices deliver a range of vibrant intensity: Stealth, Abyss, Graphite, Pulse, Sapphire, Chromium, and Frost.

One Surprise After Another

As TV infomercials like to say, "But wait, there's more!" The Yaris iA even comes standard with Keyless Entry with Push-Button Start. Push the "Start" button and the Yaris iA springs to life. Once underway, the Yaris iA zips through the workaday traffic while sipping fuel. Much credit goes to outstanding transmissions. The standard 6-speed manual is compact, lightweight and super low on friction with a short throw, making it one of the sweetest-shifting manuals around.

The available 6-speed automatic transmission is equally sporty and has some tricks to show off. It's a torque-converter automatic, providing the standing-start smoothness for which this type of transmission is renowned. Once underway, though, the converter locks for quicker, more direct shifts and greater fuel efficiency. For drivers seeking greater torque feel, Sport Mode is available with the flip of a switch.

Agility is engineered into the Yaris iA, not just added on with stiffer springs and shocks. The body structure uses effective positioning of high-tensile steel. Straight beams are used wherever possible, a continuous framework that makes the individual sections function in harmony. The structural strength allows exquisite tuning to extract a just-right balance of sporty handling and comfortable ride quality from the MacPherson strut front suspension and torsion beam rear suspension.

Steering and brake system tuning received attention, as well. A rigid steering mount provides a direct yet light feel. Its brakes are tuned for a progressive feel when cornering. Entering the curve, the pedal provides smooth operation, then leads into a more rigid feel as G-force rises.

A Big Safety Story to Tell

That high-strength structure also forms the foundation for safety in the Yaris iA. A solid H-shaped joint marries the roof and B-pillars to the underbody, and combines with high-tensile steel on key frame members, plus, a part of the floor to form a robust structure.

Yaris iA comes standard with an advanced Active Safety System that includes Dynamic Stability Control (DSC), Traction Control System (TCS), Anti-lock Brake System (ABS), Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), and Brake Over-ride System (BOS). Front side airbags and curtain airbags help protect front and rear seat occupants, and a rearview backup camera is included in the standard equipment roster.

The hallmark of the Active Safety System, Low-Speed Pre-Collision System, scans the road ahead for potential vehicle collisions. If the system detects a potential frontal collision, an audio/visual alert and braking assistance are designed to automatically activate. Should the driver not respond, this system may automatically apply the brakes.

The End of "Entry Level"

Premium chrome accents and soft-touch trim and surfaces belie the Yaris iA's price point. For starters, consider how the iA accommodates a wide range of drivers' physiques, highlighted by the 10-inch fore-aft slide adjustment and the standard seat height adjuster. The steering wheel offers tilt and telescoping adjustments. Cruise control, power windows and locks, and power exterior mirrors are standard.

Its sporty steering wheel has control switches for the audio and standard Bluetooth. The standard 7-inch Display Audio system has a touch screen, six speakers, and remote interface. Pandora, Aha and Stitcher come standard too, providing a huge music, talk, and podcast universe when paired with a compatible mobile device. For those who bring their own music to the iA, two USB ports and an auxiliary input are standard. Drivers can keep their eyes on the road and their hands on the wheel thanks to voice recognition that controls many of the multimedia system's features. An available navigation system is offered through Toyota dealers.

Limited Warranty

Toyota's 36-month/36,000 mile basic new-vehicle warranty applies to all components other than normal wear and maintenance items. Additional 60-month warranties cover the powertrain for 60,000 miles and corrosion with no mileage limitation. Standard Toyota Care is a complimentary plan covering normal factory-scheduled maintenance and 24-hour roadside assistance for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first.