

2018 Toyota Highlander Delivers on Value, Safety Features and Performance for Families of All Sizes

September 19, 2017

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The original Toyota Highlander was a pioneer in the now-expansive midsize crossover category, and so it's no wonder the current generation continues to draw accolades for its exemplary safety features, performance and overall drivability. That it could look great is a nice bonus.

Toyota quality, dependability, reliability and value seal the deal for Highlander customers, who also buy for the sleek and strong design that also helps ensure ample visibility for the driver. The front grille on LE, LE Plus and XLE grades features a silver-painted finish, while Limited and Platinum grades have a painted chrome finish. LED taillights raise visibility in all light.

The Highlander and Highlander Hybrid received significant styling, equipment and safety feature upgrades for 2017 and so carry into 2018 unchanged. Notably, all Highlander models are equipped as standard with the advanced Toyota Safety Sense P (TSS-P) driver-assist technology. Using millimeter-wave radar and a monocular camera sensor to help detect a preceding pedestrian or a preceding vehicle, TSS-P can help the driver identify a pedestrian or vehicle and automatically apply braking if necessary to help mitigate or avoid frontal collisions in certain conditions. TSS-P includes the Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Detection (PCS w/ PD) function; Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist (LDA w/ SA) function; Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) and Automatic High Beams (AHB).

Even More Safety Features

High-tech safety abounds in Highlander, especially with regard to visibility. All models come equipped with a standard backup camera. On the XLE grade and above, standard Blind Spot Monitor with Rear Cross Traffic Alert (BSM w/ RCTA) helps alert drivers to unseen hazards. Blind Spot Monitor uses radar and is designed to detect vehicles in the adjacent lane where drivers may be challenged to see them. When an object is detected, the Blind Spot Monitor indicators flash in the appropriate outside mirror, and a signal also appears on the TFT color multi-information display. The radar also provides Rear Cross Traffic Alert that is designed to detect low-speed cross traffic behind the vehicle when in reverse.

The Highlander Limited Platinum grade takes visibility and safety to new heights with standard Bird's Eye View Camera with Perimeter Scan, which helps improve the driver's ability to see all around the vehicle.

The Highlander has grown up over the years. The third-generation model is a three-row family SUV with seating for up to eight. For 2018, the Highlander Hybrid remains available in LE, XLE, Limited and Limited Platinum grades. The gas model is offered in LE, LE Plus, SE, XLE, Limited and Limited Platinum, all available in either FWD or AWD.

Family Power

There may be no "free lunch," but with the right technology, you can get both power and performance. The Highlander makes that point emphatically with the 3.5-liter D-4S Injection V6 that was introduced for 2017. The new engine boosted output to 295 horsepower and 263 lb.-ft. of torque, increases of 25 hp and 15 lb.-ft., respectively, over the previous V6 engine.

Yet, teamed to the Direct Shift – 8AT 8-speed automatic transmission, the more powerful engine also yields better EPA fuel economy estimates for all-wheel drive models: EPA-estimated 19 mpg city/26 mpg highway, versus 18/24 for the 2016 AWD model. The eight ratios, compared to six in the prior transmission, give the Highlander even better acceleration and passing abilities.

Another contributor to fuel economy, Stop and Start Engine System (S&S), is used on all Highlander V6 gas models (excluding LE). At a complete stop, the engine shuts off and then instantly and smoothly restarts when the driver's foot lifts from the brake pedal.

Room. Lots of Room.

The Highlander shows a mastery of vehicle packaging. It's just a few inches longer than a midsize sedan yet offers three-row seating and up to 158.7 cu. ft. total cabin volume. A one-step second-row sliding seat function on both driver and passenger sides makes entering the third-row easy. Third-row passengers get a standard recline function.

Even with all seat rows in use, there's still 13.8 cu. ft. of carrying space behind the third row. Folding the 60/40 split fold-flat third-row seatbacks expands the space to 42.3 cu. ft., and then to 83.7 cu. ft. with the 60/40 split fold-flat second row also lowered.

Should the driver or co-pilot need to convey any special instructions to third-row passengers, such as, "Stop picking on your sister!" there's no need to shout. The XLE grades and above come standard with Driver Easy Speak, which amplifies and broadcasts the driver's voice through the audio system's rear speakers. It makes a good tour guide tool, for parents who are so inclined.

A Soft, Quiet Place

A super-tight body structure, combined with finely tuned MacPherson strut front suspension and double-wishbone style multi-link rear suspension, endow the Highlander with an exceptionally smooth ride. Sound-control features include hydraulic engine mounts, acoustic-type windshield glass, a dash silencer and extensive body sealing.

Upholstery choices begin at the LE's premium fabric level and progresses into the available SofTex synthetic trim, then to available smooth or perforated leather. The LE Plus grade and above feature contrast stitching on all seats, and on the Limited, wood-grain pattern trim on the dash and doors add elegance. Limited Platinum models feature a unique wood accent. A soft-touch instrument panel and silver-painted, satin, and chrome-plated accents, underscore the Highlander's premium feel.

A cabin highlight is the roll-top center console that provides a big, comfortable armrest for the driver and front passenger. Its inner storage box is roomy enough to hold a very large handbag. An LCD Multi-Information Display (MID) within the gauge cluster puts vital information in the driver's line of sight. The LE and LE Plus grades feature a 4.2-inch color screen displaying odometer, current/average fuel economy, cruising range, and an ECO driving indicator. All other grades get a 4.2-inch color LCD MID providing odometer, current/average fuel economy, cruising range, average speed, AWD torque distribution (AWD gas models only), cruise control guide, navigation with turn-by-turn directions, audio status, hands-free incoming call notices, telephone information, ECO driving indicator, and energy monitor (Hybrid models only).

Dynamic Torque Control All-Wheel Drive (AWD)

All-wheel drive availability is a given with SUVs, and the V6 Highlander offers an exemplary system. Dynamic Torque Control AWD is a sophisticated driving partner that helps get the vehicle through all sorts of slippery situations.

Taking input from various sensors (vehicle speed, steering speed and angle, throttle angle and yaw rate), Dynamic Torque Control AWD actively governs torque distribution to the rear wheels via an electromagnetically controlled coupling in the rear differential. The system automatically shifts to AWD when the steering wheel is turned and when accelerating to help prevent wheel slippage, or when sensors detect wheel slippage in other situations, and can vary front-to-rear torque distribution from 100:0 to 50:50.

Under normal cruising conditions, the system remains in front-wheel drive to reduce fuel consumption. An AWD LOCK switch holds the 50:50 torque split for certain low-speed driving situations in challenging conditions up to 25 MPH. The multi-information display conveys torque-distribution information. A sophisticated, high-speed interactive management system coordinates control of the AWD, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and Electric Power Steering systems to help enhance performance, handling and safety.

SE Grade Lets the Whole Family Feel Sporty

Within the Toyota family, “SE” signifies a model with an added dash of sportiness in the styling and handling. The Highlander SE looks the part with dark paint treatment for the front grille, headlamp housings and roof rails, along with unique 19-inch wheels. The SE treatment gives Highlander more than just an athletic look. Specially tuned front and rear suspension tightens handling agility, giving it more athletic driving manners, too.

Inside, unique black leather-trimmed seats feature striking silver stitching and pattern inserts, plus matching dark dash and door accents. The SE comes as a V6-powered model in FWD or AWD in the seven-seat configuration.

Highlander Hybrid: Higher Power, Higher Fuel Efficiency

The Highlander Hybrid, one of seven hybrid models offered by Toyota for 2018, comes in the choice of LE, XLE, Limited and Limited Platinum grades. Its Hybrid Synergy Drive system also uses the direct-injection 3.5-liter V6 gasoline engine, combined here with a high-torque electric drive motor-generator to produce 306 total system horsepower. Needless to say, acceleration and passing performance are quite strong. The Hybrid is the most fuel-efficient Highlander too, with EPA-estimated 29 mpg city/27 mpg highway/28 mpg combined fuel economy ratings.

All Highlander Hybrid models come equipped with Electronic On-Demand All-Wheel-Drive System with intelligence (AWD-i) as standard. AWD-i employs a second, independent electric motor to drive the rear wheels when needed to help maintain optimal traction.

Toyota Value in Every Grade

Traditional Toyota value permeates the Highlander family, progressing to outright luxury in the top models. Here’s the rundown:

The LE and LE Plus grades are well-equipped “mono-spec” grades, with no option packages offered. The standard equipment rosters are quite extensive, with the LE featuring:

- 18-inch alloy wheels
- Entune Audio featuring a 6.1-inch touchscreen
- Bluetooth phone and music streaming
- Integrated backup camera
- Seating for eight with second- and third-row 60/40 split fold-flat seats
- Heated side mirrors with turn signal indicators
- Windshield wiper de-icer
- Tow Package on V6 models
- Five USB ports for charging electronic devices

The “Plus” for the LE Plus grade adds:

- Fabric and SofTex-trimmed seats
- Fog lights

- Height-adjustable power rear liftgate with flip-up rear hatch window
- 8-way power driver seat with lumbar support
- Entune Audio Plus with SiriusXM Satellite Radio and HD Radio with an 8-inch display monitor
- Three-zone automatic climate control
- Leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob

The XLE really turns up the comfort:

- Leather-trimmed seats
- Heated front seats
- Smart Key System with push button start
- Power tilt-slide moonroof
- Driver Easy Speak, which projects the driver's voice to rear seat passengers through the audio speakers
- Second-row integrated sun shades
- Chromtec roof rails
- 4.2-inch color multi-information display
- Anti-theft system
- Homelink (integrated garage door opener)
- Auto dimming rear view mirror
- Entune Premium Audio with Integrated Navigation and App Suite

The SE is the sporty one and adds to or replaces XLE standard features such as:

- Dark Paint treatment on the front grille, headlamp housings, and roof rails
- 19-in. split multi-spoke machined-face alloy wheels with black finish and black center caps
- Black leather-trimmed seats with silver stitching and pattern seat inserts
- Black in-dash shelf tray color with matching dash/door technical pattern inserts
- Sport tuned front and rear suspension (coil springs and shocks)

A Blu-ray DVD rear-seat entertainment system is available for the XLE and SE.

You're in Luxury Territory Now

The Highlander Limited crosses into luxury territory. It looks the part with a painted chrome grille finish and 19-inch Chromtec alloy wheels. Blue LED ambient lighting around the dash and doors casts an elegant, high-tech glow, and numerous amenities raise the comfort quotient considerably. Seating for seven includes second-row captain's chairs, perforated leather-trimmed seats, heated and ventilated front seats, a 4-way power passenger seat, and memory settings for the driver seat and side mirrors.

Added safety features include rear parking assist sonar, while entertainment is upgraded with Entune Premium JBL Audio with Integrated Navigation and App Suite. Adding the Platinum Package takes Highlander to the top with Bird's Eye View Camera with Perimeter Scan, a panoramic moonroof, heated steering wheel, heated second-row captain's chairs or outboard chairs in the optional bench seat, rain-sensing windshield wipers, dark chrome finish to the Chromtec wheels, puddle lamps that feature a Highlander Projection, and more.

Limited and Limited Platinum grades offer the choice between eight-passenger configuration with a bench-style middle row seat or seven-passenger with middle-row captain's chairs. The Limited Platinum also offers lavish brown leather interior trim.

Limited Warranty and Toyota Care

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 against corrosion with no mileage limitation. The hybrid-related components, including the HV battery, battery control module, hybrid control module and inverter with converter, are covered for eight years/100,000 miles.

All 2018 Highlander and Highlander Hybrid models come standard with ToyotaCare, a complimentary plan covering normal factory-scheduled maintenance and 24-hour roadside assistance for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first.