

2016 Toyota Avalon: Hushed and Plush, it's the Premium Midsize With a Sporty Attitude and Plenty of Power

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The Toyota Avalon has for 20 years set the benchmark for the premium midsize sedan category, an area that has seen additional competitors appear in the last several years. For 2016, the Avalon continues to set the pace by introducing a new choice for customers: two unique suspensions, one that centers around a dynamic and responsive driving experience (Touring grade), the other a high quality and comfortable ride (non-Touring grades). This change accompanies new frontal styling, an additional model grade (XLE Plus) and added equipment for all grades.

If the Avalon looks like a luxury model, well, that's the idea. Its sleek coupe-like profile, accented by tasteful chrome trim, packages a cabin with ample room for five and a spacious 16-cu. ft. trunk. The design looks even more alluring for 2016, thanks to a new front grille and turn signals. The Touring grade, now offered only in the gas model, gets its own sporty look with a new grille, LED headlights and LED daytime running lights. The Touring grade's most distinctive attribute, however, is its on-road personality. New, sporty suspension tuning and 18-in. dark gray painted alloy wheels turn the Avalon Touring into a sport sedan – albeit a quite luxurious one.

The XLE Plus becomes the step-up for the gas model and the base grade for the Avalon Hybrid. New to the XLE and XLE Plus are the standard Entune[®] Audio Plus system with 7-inch screen and Connected Navigation Scout[®] GPS Link. The latter uses the customer's smartphone to provide navigation functionality through the head unit. The XLE Premium gets Entune Premium Audio with In-Vehicle Navigation and App Suite. The XLE Premium gains Qi wireless charging for compatible smartphones, which had debuted on the Limited models.

The Limited amps up the premium look with new super chrome alloy wheels – 17-in. on the Hybrid and 18-in. for the gas model. But the Limited's biggest news for 2016 is the debut of the optional Toyota Safety Sense-P system that includes an array of driver-assist technologies: Automatic High Beam headlights, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Detection and Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist.

All Avalon grades offer a choice of paint colors that could make an exotic Italian sports car blush, including Ooh La La Rouge Mica, Sizzling Crimson Mica and Parisian Night Pearl.

The Avalon's luxuriously spacious cabin makes it a standout in the segment, and in fact is among the roomiest in the entire midsize category. Three interior color themes offered include almond, light gray and black, with the light gray gaining gray accent stitching for 2016.

Premium, Quiet

A plush, hushed cabin has been an Avalon calling card since the model debuted more than 20 years ago. That tradition is assured in the current generation design by a combination of strategically placed sound-absorbing and sound-insulating materials, acoustic-type glass used for the windshield and side glass and, foam injected into the A-, B- and C-pillars and rocker panels.

Premium amenities and design touches define the Avalon interior, with no detail too small to contribute to the luxury feel. The power windows, for example, slow down as they approach the top of the window frames, and the coin box features a damper for smooth opening and closing. The steering column tilts and telescopes. Elegant smoke chrome trim surrounds the center panel, while glossy trim frames the shifter.

The standard equipment level starts out generous and graduates to lavish. The Avalon XLE grade includes as standard, medium-grain leather seating, an 8-way power driver's seat and 4-way power front passenger seat, both with multi-stage heating standard. The Smart Key System operates on the driver door and trunk and includes push-button starting. (Higher grades have Smart Key on the passenger door, as well.) The rich-looking instrument panel uses Optitron-type gauges and a 3.5-inch thin-film transistor (TFT) color multi-information display. In the Avalon Hybrid, the display features a Hybrid System Indicator, which shows power output and regeneration.

The leather-wrapped steering wheel conveniently puts numerous controls at the driver's fingertips, including Entune Audio, cruise control, information display and hands-free phone function. The steering wheel also includes buttons for voice recognition and a vehicle-to-vehicle distance switch for Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, when so equipped.

The Limited trim moves up to premium perforated leather, along with a 10-way power driver's seat and 8-way power front passenger seat. Both are heated and ventilated, and the rear seats are heated. The Limited's automatic climate control system operates in three zones, including the rear seat area. (Other grades have a dual-zone system.) Intelligent Touch controls respond to a light touch, and can even be operated by hands with gloves or longer fingernails.

The rear window power shade in the Avalon Limited blocks the sun's rays for the rear passengers. Shift into reverse, and the shade lowers, then rises again with the shift into Drive.

A backup camera is standard for all models. In the Limited, dynamic guidelines superimposed on the display are a real boon to parking maneuvers by showing approximate distances from objects in the camera's field of view.

Powerful V6

The Avalon's standard 3.5-liter, DOHC V6 with Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing with intelligence) produces 268 horsepower at 6,200 rpm and 248 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,700 rpm. Teamed with a 6-speed automatic transmission, the V6 can move the Avalon from zero to 60 mph in less than seven seconds. No less impressive for the V6 is its EPA-rated 24 MPG combined (21 city/31 highway) fuel economy.

The V6 models feature steering-wheel-mounted paddle shifters, and Eco, Normal and Sport modes enabling the driver to tailor the Avalon's responsiveness. Sport mode revs up the driving experience by adjusting throttle response, electric power steering feel and transmission shifting – including adding throttle-blipping downshift control. Eco Mode prioritizes fuel efficiency by balancing driving performance, air conditioning function and fuel efficiency.

Powerful Hybrid

The Avalon Hybrid is the only hybrid in its segment. That's not a surprise, considering Toyota remains the industry's hybrid leader with seven models for 2016. The Hybrid Synergy Drive system combines output from a 2.5-liter Atkinson cycle four-cylinder engine and a high-torque electric motor.

The system produces a combined 200 horsepower and varies power between the gas engine and electric motor, or combines both, as needed, channeling torque through a unique planetary gear-type continuously variable transmission. Air conditioning and power steering systems are driven electrically and continue to operate when the car is operating under electric power alone or when the auto start/stop system shuts off the gas engine.

In EV Drive mode, the Avalon Hybrid can drive solely on the electric motor for a short distance at speeds under about 20 mph. Augmenting the conventional brake system, regenerative braking produced by the electric motor/generator in the transaxle captures the kinetic energy of the wheels, storing it in the hybrid battery. The compact nickel-metal-hydride battery, located in the trunk area, allows a generous 14 cu.-ft. of trunk space.

In Tune with Entune®

The Avalon's quietude sets the ideal soundstage for any of the three available audio systems: standard 8-speaker Entune Audio Plus; available 9-speaker Entune Premium Audio with in-car Navigation and App Suite, or the available Entune Premium JBL® Audio with Navigation and App Suite and 11 JBL GreenEdge™ speakers.

The 8-speaker Entune Audio Plus system with 7-inch touch-screen display is equipped with AM/FM CD player, SiriusXM Radio with 3-month complimentary trial, HD Radio and HD Radio traffic and weather in major metro areas. It comes ready to connect with the Entune Multimedia Bundle, auxiliary audio jack, USB 2.0 port with

iPod® connectivity and control, advanced voice recognition, plus Bluetooth® for hands-free phone capability, phone book access and music streaming.

And that's just the standard system in the XLE and XLE Plus. The 9-speaker Entune Premium Audio with Navigation in the XLE Premium and Touring uses a 7-inch high-resolution touch screen with split-screen capability. The App Suite adds HD Radio predictive traffic and Doppler weather overlay, Gracenote album cover art and AM/FM cache radio, which lets you pause up to 20 minutes of a broadcast to replay later. Toyota's Entune App Suite functions through a smartphone interface and brings applications including Destination Search™, iHeartRadio, MovieTickets.com™, OpenTable®, and Pandora® to the vehicle audio display.

The Entune Premium JBL Audio with Navigation system uses a 12-channel external JBL Synthesis amplifier and 11 speakers, including two subwoofers, and features GreenEdge™ technology that reduces power draw on the car's electrical system. It's a sonic feast for the ears.

The Avalon caters to a device-centric world. Its eBin™ electronics storage tray in the center console can store two devices and charge them with jacks located below it. A storage box beneath the eBin can store devices out of sight while they recharge. The eBin tray is illuminated by LEDs at night.

Safety In All Directions

The Avalon comes equipped with 10 standard airbags and the Toyota Star Safety System that includes Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRAC), Anti-lock Brake System (ABS), Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), and Smart Stop brake-override Technology (SST).

The available Blind Spot Monitor uses radar to detect vehicles in the adjacent lane where drivers may be challenged to see them. The same radar technology provides a Rear Cross Traffic Alert that is designed to detect low-speed cross traffic behind the vehicle when in reverse. Once an object is detected the Blind Spot Monitor indicators are displayed in the appropriate outside mirror, and a signal also appears on the TFT color display.

Available Dynamic Radar Cruise Control uses a radar sensor at the front of the vehicle to help control speed and keep a pre-set distance from the vehicle traveling directly ahead. The available Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Detection is designed to help mitigate the effects of certain frontal vehicle impacts. The first stage retracts the front seat belts and primes the brake system, and the second stage is designed to compensate for inadequate brake pedal pressure by applying optimal brake system effort.

Warranty Protection 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.

The 2016 Avalon and Avalon Hybrid come standard with Toyota Care, a complimentary plan covering normal factory-scheduled maintenance and 24-hour roadside assistance for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first.