

2015 Toyota Avalon Marks 20 Years of Blurring the Lines of Luxury

October 20, 2014

Sometimes, bigger is just right. That's been a key to the success for the Toyota Avalon premium midsize sedan for 20 years. With crystal clarity, the 2015 Avalon shows how this model blurs the lines between mid-size, full-size and entry-luxury categories.

The 2015 Avalon ushers in a new round of refinements in the third year of its fourth-generation design. Taking advantage of the Avalon's coupe-like silhouette and chiseled lines, a new XLE Touring Sport Edition makes a striking style statement. Available exclusively in Attitude Black contrasted by dark blue interior trim and stitching, the best looker in the premium midsize segment just got even sharper – and even a bit sinister looking.

The Avalon XLE Touring Sport Edition cuts through the night with standard HID Quadbeam headlights from the Limited trim line. By day, LED daytime running lights (DRLs) – also from the Limited — announce this special Avalon model's arrival. Exclusive 18-inch black-painted machine-finished wheels complete the exterior makeover.

In other Avalon news for 2015, Toyota value rises with the inclusion of standard paddle shifters on all models (formerly only on Touring and Limited) and with an upgrade to new Entune[®] multimedia audio systems. The XLE Touring and XLE Hybrid Touring gain Blind Spot Monitor as a standard feature.

The luxuriously spacious cabin makes the Avalon a standout in the segment. Its accommodations are among the roomiest in the entire midsize category. With 103.6 cu. ft. of cabin space and a 16-cu. ft. trunk, the Avalon approaches full-size stature, yet its trim dimensions and svelte weight of 3,505 lbs. (XLE Touring grades) keep it firmly in the sporty/agile camp.

The 2015 Avalon offers a choice between an energetic yet silky-smooth V6 powertrain and Toyota Hybrid Synergy Drive. The V6 comes in all grades: XLE, XLE Premium, XLE Touring, new XLE Touring Sport Edition and Limited. The Hybrid is available in the XLE Premium, XLE Touring and Limited grades.

The Avalon remains the only car in its class to offer a hybrid. It makes up one of seven hybrid models in the brand's lineup, making Toyota the clear hybrid leader. All versions of the 2015 Avalon Hybrid are rated by the EPA at an estimated 40-mpg combined fuel economy (40 MPG city / 39 MPG highway). That's Corolla-like fuel economy in a big, roomy sedan filled to the brim with luxury amenities.

Looks Great Cheating the Wind

Credit for all the admiring glances the Avalon draws primarily goes to the company's Caltex Design Research in Newport Beach, Calif., which designed the exterior. A low 0.28 coefficient of drag (Cd) lets the Avalon slice through wind resistance, a boon to aid both fuel economy and strength. Some credit for the efficient aerodynamics goes to details like the sleek side mirrors, which house a turn signal lamp, heater, memory positioning, a puddle lamp, available Blind Spot Monitor indicator and available auto-dimming electrochromatic glass.

Feels and Sounds Like Comfort

Calty Design Research also gets much of the credit for an interior that anyone could mistake for that of a much more expensive luxury model. The engaging yet supremely refined driving experience, highlighted by a hushed cabin, sculpted soft-touch interior surfaces and easy-to-use multimedia, also encroaches on luxury territory.

Exquisite quietness comes from 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. The Avalon's quietude sets the stage for any of the three available audio systems: standard 8-speaker Entune Audio Plus; available 9-speaker Entune Premium Audio with Navigation and App Suite; or the available Entune Premium JBL® Audio with Navigation and App Suite with 11 JBL GreenEdge™ speakers.

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. But it's the sonic feast for two ears that impresses most.

An interior available in three themes — almond, light grey and black – is replete with premium touches, such as smoke chrome trim surrounding the center panel and glossy trim around the shifter. The leather-wrapped steering wheel puts a multitude of controls at the driver's fingertips, including 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.

Premium certainly describes the seating, which in the XLE includes an 8-way power driver's seat and 4-way power front passenger seat, both with multi-stage heating standard. Also standard, medium-grain genuine leather covers seating in the XLE.

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 Limited also features standard heated rear seats.

In the Avalon Limited, the 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.

Luxury Details Everywhere You Look and Touch

Eyes and hands find luxury details throughout the Avalon's cabin. Actually, those details start outside with the standard Smart Key System on the driver door and trunk with push-button starting. On grades above the XLE, the system also features Smart Key function for both driver and front passenger doors. On the XLE Premium and above, the rear-view mirror integrates a compass display and HomeLink® transceiver.

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 – informative for the driver, and perhaps a bit entertaining for the passenger.

Even backing up in an Avalon feels luxurious. All Avalon models come with a backup camera as standard. 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. The rear window power shade in the Avalon Limited blocks the sun's rays for the rear passengers. Shift into reverse, and the shade rises until shifting into Drive.

Even if you don't notice how the Avalon's power windows slow down as they approach the top of the window

frames, you'll appreciate the absence of wind noise as a result. The smallest details matter: The coin box to the left of the steering wheel shows the luxury touch with a damper for smooth opening and closing.

Catering to Your Devices

The Avalon even treats wireless devices with refinement. The eBin™ electronics storage tray in the center console can store two devices (cellphones or iPod®, for instance) side-by-side on a high-grip surface. Charging jacks are located below the tray, which can be opened and closed with cables passing neatly through a slot. An electronics storage box beneath the eBin can store devices out of sight while they recharge. The Avalon Limited gas and hybrid both offer the Qi wireless phone charging capability for the eBin storage tray as an option. Two DC 12v power outlets, an AUX and a USB jack are accessible in the front storage box, with the large-capacity rear console box offering a third. The eBin tray is illuminated by LEDs at night.

Two Kinds of Power

Toyota Avalon accelerates powerfully and quietly with a standard 3.5-liter, DOHC V6, an interesting contrast to the 4-cylinder engines now used in some midsize luxury models. Dual VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing with intelligence) ensures ample torque across the engine speed range.

The engine 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. Fuel efficiency is equally impressive, with EPA-rated 24 mpg combined (21 city/31 highway).

Feeling sporty? Push the shift lever from D into S mode and shift manually. Sport mode provides highly responsive upshift control and throttle blipping downshift control. All V6 models feature steering-wheel-mounted paddle shifters.

And, there's a drive mode to suit the mood, with 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 and by increasing the Electric Power Steering effort for a more direct, responsive feel. Eco Mode prioritizes fuel efficiency by balancing driving performance, air conditioning function and fuel efficiency.

Avalon and Avalon Hybrid models ride on standard 17-inch alloy wheels with 215/55R17 tires. The 18-inch alloy wheels on V6-powered XLE Touring, The XLE Touring Sport Edition and Limited models come with P225/45R18 tires for enhanced handling and grip. The Hybrid model's wheel features a unique design with thinner spokes. In all models, an electric power steering system (EPS) assist provides a lighter effort sensation at lower speeds and increased effort and on-center feel at higher speeds. The steering column tilts and telescopes.

Hybrid Synergy Drive

Once you know that the EPA estimated the Avalon Hybrid at 40-MPG combined fuel economy rating, the 8.0-second zero-to-60 acceleration performance might come as a bit of a shock. More significant, though, is the car's substantial torque, which makes this roomy sedan feel quick and responsive in everyday driving. And, the Avalon Hybrid comes equipped with a 17-gallon fuel tank capacity, offering an extended driving range.

The powertrain is a modified version of the Hybrid Synergy Drive system that also propels the Camry Hybrid, and, remember, the Avalon Hybrid is no heavyweight on the scales. In fact, it's just 133 lbs. heavier than the V6 gasoline model. The compactly sized nickel-metal-hydride battery, located in the trunk area, still allows a generous 14 cu.-ft. of trunk space.

The Hybrid Synergy Drive system combines output from the 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. A driver-selectable ECO mode optimizes throttle response and air conditioning output to help prioritize fuel economy.

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.

Connect with Entune Multimedia

The Avalon comes prepared to inform and connect. The standard 8-speaker Entune Audio Plus system is equipped with SiriusXM Radio with 3-month complimentary trial, HD radio, HD traffic and weather in major metro areas, integrated backup camera display (with projected path) and includes the Entune Multimedia Bundle with 6.1 in touch-screen display, AM/FM CD player, auxiliary audio jack, USB 2.0 port with iPod® connectivity and control, advanced voice recognition, hands-free phone capability, phone book access and music streaming via Bluetooth® wireless technology.

Toyota's Entune App Suite functions through a smartphone interface and brings applications including Bing™, iHeartRadio, MovieTickets.com™, OpenTable®, and Pandora® to the vehicle audio display.

The 9-speaker Entune Premium Audio with Navigation (with a 7-inch high-resolution touch screen with split-screen display) and App Suite in the XLE Touring adds HD predictive traffic and doppler weather overlay, Gracenotes album cover art and AM/FM cache radio, which lets you pause up to 20 minutes of a broadcast to replay later.

The Avalon Limited model features the Entune Premium JBL Audio with Navigation and App Suite system that adds 11 JBL® GreenEdge™ speakers in nine locations including subwoofer and amplifier. The system also includes a seven-inch, high-resolution touchscreen display and voice driven search for iPod or USB connected device. DVD playback capability, split-screen capability, audio information or vehicle information can be displayed together with a map on the main navigation screen.

Safety In All Directions

Equipped with 10 standard airbags, the Toyota Avalon was designed to protect. Like all Toyota models, the Avalon features the STAR™ Safety System, which 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.

The available pre-collision system 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.

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.

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 2015 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.