

Toyota 4Runner: 30 Years of Faithful Service and Fun, Now Offered in Rugged TRD Pro Series Formula

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The list of three-row SUVs that can tackle the great outdoors and still handle everyday driving with equal dexterity is indeed short. The Toyota 4Runner, one of the first vehicles on this list, remains a key player. Fresh off a restyle for 2014 that bolstered its rugged good looks, the 4Runner heads into 2015 offering a new TRD Pro edition engineered and equipped for even greater off-pavement capability.

Now in its fifth design generation, the Toyota 4Runner has, for three decades, been a stalwart for SUV drivers seeking rugged, go-anywhere capability. While 4Runner has continued development in balancing off-road capability, on-road handling and ride quality, it has also steadily evolved in the area of comfort and convenience.

The 4Runner sticks to a proven formula: rugged body-on-frame construction with 4-link rear axle, coil-spring suspension and a choice of 2WD, part-time 4WD with a 2-speed transfer case or full-time multi-mode 4WD with a 2-speed transfer case and locking center differential. A 4.0-liter, 270-horsepower V6 teamed to a 5-speed ECT-i automatic transmission powers all versions.

The 2015 4Runner is available as a well equipped SR5; SR5 Premium with additional amenities; Trail; Trail Premium; Limited, and, new for 2015, TRD Pro Series for ultimate off-road capability. Available third-row seats on SR5 and Limited allow for up to seven-passenger capacity. The Trail and Limited offer high-tech suspension upgrades.

The TRD Pro Series comes fortified for trail duty with TRD front springs, TRD Bilstein high-performance shocks with rear remote reservoirs, Nitto Terra Grappler tires and a TRD front skid plate. The TRD Pro Series looks the tough part, too, with 17-inch black TRD alloy wheels, unique front grille, black bumper accents and special badges. Color choices include black, white and, exclusive to this special model, Inferno.

Ruggedness Goes More Than Metal Deep

The Toyota 4Runner design includes a muscular grille and smoked headlamps, which adds to its rugged image, and it's backed up by capability.

You'll easily identify the 4Runner Trail by its color-keyed bumpers and overfenders, aggressive looking hood scoop and silver painted front and rear bumper accents. The Limited shows that luxury and ruggedness are not mutually exclusive. It's the only 4Runner with a chrome-plated grille insert, and its chrome front bumper trim extends to the foglamp bezels. The side molding, roof rack and rear bumper are also chrome trimmed. The 20-inch machine-finished wheels are another Limited-exclusive feature.

All 4Runners come equipped with projector beam headlights and LED rear combination lamps. The SR5, Trail and TRD Pro ride on 17-inch alloy wheels and, all 4Runner models come with a full-size spare tire.

What Makes 4Runner Tick?

Toyota long ago mastered the engineering art of full-capability SUVs. The 4Runner has been the recipient of off-road engineering for more than 30 years. All 4Runner grades are equipped with a 4.0-liter V6 that generates 270 horsepower at 5,600 rpm and 278 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,400 rpm. Dual Independent Variable Valve Timing with intelligence (VVT-i) optimizes torque across the engine's operating range, so 4Runner can easily handle inclines and trailer towing. That's why an integrated tow-hitch receiver and wiring harness come as standard equipment. The 4Runner can tow up to 4,700 pounds, with a 470-pound tongue weight.

The 4Runner balances comfort, capability, and control thanks to a double-wishbone independent front suspension, variable-flow rack-and-pinion steering, and coil springs and gas shock absorbers at all four corners. The four-link rear suspension maximizes off-road suspension articulation while still providing a smooth and confident ride both on and off pavement.

The 4Runner SR5 2WD comes with an Automatic Limited Slip Differential (Auto LSD) feature, a function of the traction control (TRAC) that allows some degree of wheel slippage to help the vehicle dig out from sand or snow, for example. The SR5 is also available with a part-time 4WD system that uses Active Traction Control (A-TRAC) and bolsters off-road capability with a two-speed transfer case with low-range. By distributing drive force to any one wheel in contact with the ground, A-TRAC can make terrain irregularities and slippery patches virtually transparent to the driver.

The 4Runner Limited is equipped with a full-time 4WD system with a TORSSEN center differential with locking feature and a three-mode, center console-mounted switch. The system uses a 40:60 torque split in most driving and alters that in response to slippage. If the front wheels are slipping while the vehicle is turning, the TORSSEN diff changes the split to 30:70. If the rear wheels are slipping while the vehicle is turning, the diff changes to a 53:47 split.

Send in the Reinforcements

All 4Runner models come standard with Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), which provides additional control when accelerating from a stop up a steep incline by helping to hold the vehicle stationary while the driver transitions their foot from the brake pedal to the accelerator. HAC is a versatile feature, useful in hilly stop and go city driving or steep-mountain off-road driving. The 4WD models also feature standard Downhill Assist Control (DAC). This feature augments the low-speed descending controllability by helping to maintain a constant slow speed and preventing wheel lockup, allowing the driver to concentrate primarily on steering.

The Trail grade gets additional capability from a standard electronic-locking rear differential and Toyota's Crawl Control (CRAWL) feature. The latter helps maintain a constant speed, enhancing vehicle control when driving up and over obstacles in challenging off-road situations. With the transfer case shifted into low range, CRAWL regulates both engine speed and braking force to propel the vehicle forward or in reverse at one of the five driver-selectable low-speed settings. The driver can thus focus on steering over obstacles without having to also modulate the throttle or brake pedal.

The Multi-Terrain Select system is another tool in the Trail grade's utility belt. Using a dial, the driver can select which mode most closely matches the prevailing terrain and conditions and the system will adjust wheel slip accordingly. For example, on loose terrain such as mud and sand, more-than-normal wheel slip is permitted, allowing wheel-spin to work in the vehicle's favor.

The Mogul setting is for any extremely uneven terrain, such as V-ditches, slopes, and ridges — uphill or down. In this mode, wheel slip is minimized and the system acts more like a limited slip differential. On the 4Runner Trail, an overhead console groups the off-road control switches into one location.

Suspension of Disbelief

True off-road enthusiasts should look to the 4Runner Trail or new TRD Pro models. They offer superior approach and departure angles, high ground clearance, and an array of functional upgrades for the most demanding active outdoor enthusiast. The available Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System (KDSS) in the 4Runner Trail allows for extended wheel travel at slow speed for greater off-road capability and stability. On the road, KDSS provides a nimble sporty handling feel by reducing body lean when cornering.

Customers who choose the Limited grade definitely value comfort and performance, which is why it comes standard with the innovative X-REAS suspension to enhance agility and ride smoothness. X-REAS automatically adjusts the damping force of shocks when driving over bumpy surfaces or when cornering. The system uses a center control absorber to cross-link shocks on opposite corners of the vehicle, substantially reducing pitch and yaw by offsetting opposing inputs.

Room, Versatility and Value

The Toyota 4Runner in any form is a real workhorse. Fold-flat second-row seats provide a level load floor, and it is not necessary to remove the headrests to fold the seats flat. The available third-row seat is split 50/50 and also folds flat. The seats can be folded from the side or at the rear, using separate one-touch levers. The second-row seats, which include a center armrest, individually recline up to 16 degrees in four steps for added passenger comfort. Third-row seating is available on SR5 and Limited grades. When so equipped, the 40/20/40 second-row seat has a one-touch walk-in function to provide easy access to the third row.

How much room is there? The cargo area behind the second-row seats offers up to 47.2 cu. ft. With the second row folded, it's a whopping 89.7 cu. ft., which is quite generous for a midsize SUV. An available pull-out cargo deck is capable of carrying up to 440 pounds to make loading and unloading heavy items easier and to provide seating for tailgating and campsite relaxation. In both cases, the standard 120V outlet and two 12V outlets are sure to find good use.

Air conditioning with rear seat vents and pollen filter, power-sliding liftgate window, and a backup camera are among the standard features that make the 4Runner SR5 an outstanding value. The standard Optitron[®] instrument panel adds a real touch of elegance and technology for all grades. A multi-information display provides readouts for numerous vehicle functions and fuel economy.

The SR5 Premium adds the comfort of SofTex-trimmed seats, heated front seats, power moonroof, an auto-dimming rear-view mirror and more. The Trail Premium receives the same upgraded features, while the Limited gets downright luxurious with leather-trimmed heated and ventilated 8-way power driver's seat (with memory) and 4-way power front passenger seat, dual-zone automatic climate control and the Smart Key system with push button start. The Limited also gets a standard front and rear clearance sonar system.

Standard Entune[®] Multimedia

The SR5 and Trail grade models feature Entune Audio Plus, which includes Toyota's Entune multimedia system, an AM/FM/MP3 CD player with eight speakers, integrated SiriusXM[®] All-Access Satellite Radio (with 3-month trial subscription), a USB port with iPod[®] connectivity, and Bluetooth[®] hands-free phone capability and music streaming.

The Limited gets the Entune Premium JBL[®] Audio system, which incorporates a JBL[®] premium sound system with navigation, SiriusXM All-Access Satellite Radio (with 3-month trial subscription), HD Radio with iTunes[®] tagging and 15 speakers. The navigation system uses a large seven-inch monitor.

Entune is a collection of popular mobile apps and data services. Once a smart phone is connected to the vehicle using Bluetooth wireless technology or a USB cable, Entune's features are operated using the vehicle's controls or, for some services, by voice recognition. Entune offers mobile apps for Bing[™], iHeartRadio, MovieTickets.com, OpenTable[®], and Pandora[®]. Entune data services include a fuel price guide, sports scores, stocks, traffic and weather.

Star Safety System and Safety Connect

The 4Runner features Toyota's standard Star Safety System[™] that includes Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) with traction control (TRAC, or A-TRAC with 4WD), an Anti-lock Brake System (ABS) with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), and Smart Stop Technology (SST) brake-override system.

Eight standard airbags include front, seat-mounted side airbags, knee airbags for the driver and front passenger, and side-curtain airbags for the second and third rows (when so equipped).

The 4Runner Limited offers the Safety Connect[™] telematics system. Available by subscription, Safety Connect offers Automatic Collision Notification, Stolen Vehicle Location, Emergency Assistance Button (SOS), and Roadside Assistance. When Safety Connect is ordered, it includes a one-year trial subscription.

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 powertrain for 60,000 miles and corrosion with no mileage limitation. The 4Runner will also 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.