

Toyota Highlander Adds XSE Grade + Toyota Safety Sense 2.5+ for 2021

November 03, 2020



PLANO, Texas (2020) – The fourth-generation Toyota Highlander’s bold, distinctive design takes it one step further for 2021 with the introduction of the XSE grade, now standard Toyota Safety Sense 2.5+ (TSS 2.5+) and LED headlamp enhancements for L, LE and XLE.

Highlander XSE: More Fun for Everyone

In the Toyota world, the XSE badge signals a drive on the sporty side with specially tuned handling suspension, unique exterior styling, and exclusive interior trim. For 2021, and for the first time in its 20-year history, the Highlander family SUV gets the XSE treatment.

Starting at an MSRP of \$41,405 for the FWD variant, the Highlander XSE combines bold exterior design with more agile driving reflexes. Positioned between the XLE and Limited grades, the 2021 Highlander XSE is briskly motivated by a 295-horsepower 3.5-liter V6 that’s teamed with an eight-speed automatic transmission. It’s available with either Front-Wheel Drive or Dynamic Torque Vectoring All-Wheel Drive.

In addition to being able to send up to 50 percent of torque to the rear wheels, this advanced available AWD

system can control the left/right torque distribution to the rear wheels for a more engaging driving experience. In addition, the Multi-Terrain Select feature, controlled by a dial on the center console, allows the driver to adjust drivetrain responses to prevailing road and weather conditions.

The Highlander XSE handles curves as well as its design takes compliments. In addition to exclusive machined-faced 20-inch wheels with black accents, the XSE model is equipped with higher-rate springs and rear stabilizer bar, and the shock absorbers have been re-tuned for lower friction. Electric power steering has also been re-tuned for a sportier steering feel. These carefully calibrated new parts boost handling agility for the XSE while preserving Highlander's renowned ride comfort.

To make the XSE grade, Highlander received a bumper-to-bumper style makeover. The front fascia, grille, and lower spoiler are exclusive to this model and impart a more aggressive stance. The restyled upper grille joins a much larger lower air intake integrated into the new bumper, with a spoiler below that. Unique headlamps feature black accents and light-strip DRLs.

In profile, unique rocker panels add an edgy accent to the Highlander XSE's sculpted lines. Around back, there's a shocker: the first-ever twin-tip exhaust on a Highlander. Black roof rails, mirror caps, and window moldings dial up the subtle cool factor.

Inside, the Highlander XSE rocks black SofTex®-trimmed seats with fabric inserts, while ambient lighting and carbon-fiber finish on the instrument panel sets the mood. A striking two-tone red and black leather-trimmed interior with red-stitched instrument panel is available. The 2021 Highlander XSE comes ready to take on all devices with Android Auto™, Apple CarPlay®, and Amazon Alexa compatibility, as well as five USB ports and an all access 3-month trial of SiriusXM®.

The Highlander XSE will also offer an available Premium Audio 1200-Watt, 11-speaker JBL® sound system and dynamic navigation with a 3-year trial.

Upgraded to Standard Toyota Safety Sense 2.5+ (TSS 2.5+)

Whether they're young families or empty nesters exploring a new chapter in life, safety remains a top priority for Highlander customers. For 2021, the Toyota Highlander is upgraded with standard Toyota Safety Sense (TSS 2.5+), a comprehensive suite of active safety systems that includes:

- Pre-collision System with Pedestrian Detection is enhanced with intersection support:
 - At intersections, the system may detect an oncoming vehicle or pedestrian when performing a left-hand turn and may provide audio/visual alerts and automatic braking in certain conditions.
 - Additional PCS function includes emergency steering assist, which is designed to stabilize the driver's emergency steering maneuvers within their lane while avoiding a preceding pedestrian
- Road Sign Assist (RSA)
- Full-Speed Range Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC)
- Lane Keeping Technology: Lane Departure Alert with Steering Assist (LDA w/ SA), Lane Tracing Assist (LTA) and Sway Warning System
- Automatic High Beams (AHB)

Additionally, for 2021, the L, LE, and XLE, headlamps are updated to a projector-style lamp for even better visibility.

Pre-Collision System with Pedestrian Detection offers automatic braking capability under certain circumstances should the driver not react in time in a system-detected emergency situation. Blind Spot Monitor (BSM) with

Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA) are standard on LE grade and above. Rear Cross Traffic Braking (RCTB) is available with clearance sonar on Limited and above.

The standard backup camera features projected path, while the Limited's backup camera comes standard with dynamic gridlines. A Bird's Eye View Camera with Perimeter Scan is available on Limited and standard on Platinum and provides a live rotating 360-degree view around the vehicle.

The 2021 Highlander is equipped with eight airbags, including side curtain airbags for all three rows. Toyota's Star Safety System includes Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRAC), Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), and Smart Stop Technology (SST). Hybrid models will receive Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM) as well. VDIM provides integrated control of the ABS, brake assist, TRAC, VSC, hill-start assist control and EPS systems. It helps to maintain vehicle stability when swerving on slippery road surfaces by controlling the brakes, hybrid system output and steering assist.

The Strong, Athletic Type

Setting off the bold design, the L, LE and XLE grades feature a black front grille with silver-colored paint surround, while the Limited and Platinum grades are distinguished by a black grille with chrome-colored trim, high output LED fog lights, and the Highlander's first-ever 20-inch alloy wheels. The Platinum grade stands apart with silver-colored painted front bumper and rear fascia and a unique 20-inch wheel.

While Highlander's design will turn heads everywhere it goes, it's also highly functional. Greater aerodynamic efficiency reduces wind noise while enhancing vehicle stability.

The presence of *takumi* is evident whenever the driver experiences the Highlander's premium touch and feel in everyday driving. Throughout vehicle development, these highly trained master craftsmen focused on the finest technical details to ensure a level of operating smoothness in all driving conditions, especially at everyday speeds.

Interior Details

Looking sporty does not come at the expense of practicality in the 2021 Highlander. The L and LE grades come standard with second-row bench for seating for eight, while the XLE and Limited grade come standard with a Captain's Chair second row with seating for seven and the option of second-row bench for seating for eight. Finally, the Platinum grade will come standard with Captain's Chair second row with seating for seven. Either way, the large rear doors provide easy access, while versatile seat folding features make it easy to enter the third row. And, passengers in the third row stay comfortable thanks to standard three-zone climate control that ensures ample flow of warmed or cooled air.

With all seat rows in use, Highlander offers 16.0 cu. ft. of carrying space behind the third row. Folding the 60/40 split fold-flat third-row seatbacks opens the space to 48.4 cu. ft., and then folding the second row raises that to 84.3 cu. ft. The versatile cargo area makes the most of its additional length with side surfaces and pockets shaped for maximum space usage.

Power, Performance and Panache ... with Efficiency

Power and efficiency are a whole lot sexier when wrapped in Highlander's striking design. The 2021 Highlander offers a choice between two advanced powertrains, a gas V6 or the Toyota Hybrid System.

The 295-horsepower 3.5-liter V6 is the epitome of smoothness. Its Toyota-innovated D-4S Injection system combines direct fuel injection with port fuel injectors to help optimize efficiency, power and emissions in all conditions. Dual Variable Valve Timing with intelligence (Dual VVT-i) likewise helps ensure ideal response and efficiency at all engine speeds.

That translates into 295 horsepower and 263 lb.-ft. of torque, which further translates into exemplary everyday performance and generous towing capability. The Direct Shift 8-speed automatic transmission maximizes Highlander's acceleration and highway merging capability while operating seamlessly and transparently.

On V6 models, the available towing package enables a 5,000-pound towing capacity. The package includes a heavy-duty radiator with engine oil cooler. Trailer Sway Control (TSC) uses the Vehicle Stability Control to help control unwanted trailer movement.

Why use fuel when you don't need to? The Highlander's standard Stop and Start Engine System allows the engine to shut off when the vehicle comes to a complete stop, and then instantly restarts when the driver's foot lifts from the brake pedal. This technology helps reduce fuel consumption and cuts emissions.

Hybrid Aims Even Higher

The Toyota Hybrid System in the 2021 Highlander Hybrid combines a high-efficiency 2.5-liter DOHC four-cylinder engine with two electric. The gas engine employs Variable Valve Timing-intelligent system by Electric motor (VVT-iE) on the intake camshaft, and VVT-i on the exhaust camshaft. A variable cooling system (electric water pump, electric thermostat) and a fully variable oil pump help to further enhance engine efficiency.

The bottom line is an eye opener for the efficiency-minded: 243 total system horsepower and up to an EPA-estimated 36 combined MPG. The hybrid is available in either front-Wheel Drive (FWD) or All-Wheel Drive (AWD.)

The transaxle mounts the electric motors (MG1 and MG2) coaxially rather than in-line, and the resulting smaller and lighter package reduces frictional losses. The gas engine and MG2 work in concert to deliver dynamic performance, while both MG1 and MG2 charge the hybrid battery.

To reduce the transaxle's size and weight, the reduction gear is a parallel shaft gear rather than a planetary gear, and a multi-function gear integrates the power-split planetary ring gear, parking gear, and counter-drive gear. Computer integration and a smaller, lighter power stack installed directly above the transaxle help reduce energy transmission losses.

The battery pack is small enough to be installed under the rear seats so it does not take up any cargo or passenger space. This means Highlander Hybrid drivers get all the benefits of a hybrid powertrain without sacrificing much-needed cargo room for everyday activities.

Seamless Everyday Performance

The Highlander Hybrid delivers its exemplary fuel economy and performance without calling attention to its high-tech powertrain operation. Quite the contrary, like all Toyota Hybrid vehicles, it simply goes about its business in a transparent way. For example, the system optimizes the level of electric motor assistance and gas engine speed without the engine running at high revs. Engine speed is synchronized with vehicle speed, yielding effortless and quiet acceleration.

As on many modern vehicles, the Highlander Hybrid offers selectable NORMAL, ECO and SPORT driving

modes that let the driver choose the vehicle's performance personality. The bonus is the EV mode, which allows electric-only driving at low speeds for short distances.

SPORT mode unlocks boost from the hybrid system for improved acceleration response. ECO mode gets maximum efficiency from the fuel and battery, while NORMAL mode is ideal for everyday driving.

Special, easy-to-use hybrid tech adds an element of control and fun. Using a sequential shifting feature, the driver can “downshift” to increase the regenerative braking in steps, which helps foster greater control when driving in hilly areas, for example.

The 2021 Highlander Hybrid can also coach the driver to drive as economically as possible. For example, an accelerator guide function suggests an acceleration level to the driver according to the driving conditions, and a scoring function adds a measure of fun-to-eco driving.

Features for More Efficiency

Highlander Hybrid's Predictive Efficient Drive (PED) analyzes the driver's daily driving habits and upcoming road and traffic conditions to more efficiently charge and discharge the hybrid battery accordingly alongside actual driving.

The more the vehicle is driven, the more data is accumulated, contributing to practical fuel efficiency. Many actual roads chosen to represent common usage scenarios, such as in urban congestion or on mountain roads, were driven and analyzed to create control that feels natural to the driver when operating to help enable more efficient driving.

All-Wheel Drive

The 2021 Highlander gets a grip on any road with a choice of FWD or three different available AWD systems — two for the V6 models and a unique AWD system for the Highlander Hybrid. For the Highlander Gas L, LE and XLE models, the optional AWD system can send up to 50 percent of available torque to the rear wheels to help counter wheel slip when necessary.

Dynamic Torque Vectoring AWD with Drive Mode Select and Driveline Disconnect is available for the Highlander Limited and Platinum for even greater agility and capability. In addition to governing torque distribution between the front and rear wheels, this advanced system uses special couplings to actively manage torque distribution between the left and right rear wheels.

Dynamic Torque Vectoring AWD doesn't need wheel slippage before springing into action. Rather, a sophisticated AWD Integrated Management (AIM) system manages Electric Power Steering (EPS), throttle control, transmission shift control and drive torque distribution to continually help optimize handling.

Using the Multi-Terrain Select control dial on the console, the driver can maximize traction when driving through inclement weather or road conditions. Mud & Sand mode works well for beach driving while Rock & Dirt mode optimizes AWD traction for trails. The driver can monitor, in real time, torque allocation and slip control on the Multi-Information Display (MID).

In addition, Highlander models include the following features for optimal on-road and off-road performance and safety:

- Hill Start Assist Control (HAC)
- Trailer Sway Control (TSC)

- Downhill Assist Control (DAC) (available on Gas AWD only)

AWD is a great traction partner, but it's not needed all the time, such as during steady highway cruising. In such situations, Rear Driveline Disconnect automatically disengages drive to the rear wheels and stops the propeller shaft's rotation. As one might guess, that reduces the energy needed to propel the vehicle and, therefore, helps reduce fuel consumption. When AWD is needed, the system instantly re-engages without the driver even noticing.

Hybrid AWD

The 2021 model's AWD employs a separate rear-mounted electric motor to power the rear wheels when needed. Like the hybrid powertrain itself, the AWD works seamlessly and transparently.

The rear electric motor operates independently with no mechanical connection between the transmission and the rear wheels. Preemptively distributing more driving force to the rear wheels, such as when accelerating, helps suppress front wheel slip during off-the-line starts. The system also helps enhance cornering agility by reducing understeer. And, when venturing onto a trail, the increased rear-wheel torque helps move the Highlander Hybrid confidently over rough or slippery surfaces.

A Certain Level of Comfort

From the L grade to the top-of-line Platinum, the 2021 Highlander offers plush accommodations across all grades. Taking inspiration from luxury crafted interiors to create a more premium ambience, details include softer padded surfaces and a more tailored look with stitching that continues from the door trim to the instrument panel. The dash integrates the multimedia and HVAC controls in an elegant and functional way.

The cabin's center console offers available Qi wireless charging to plenty of storage spaces and five USB charging ports. On Limited and Platinum grades, ambient LED lighting sets a relaxing mood. Inset steering wheel controls are a modern luxury touch on all grades.

Highlanders have long been renowned for a quiet ride and, with the high-strength TNGA platform, Toyota pushes the bar even higher. Sound-dampening and soundproofing materials are optimized throughout the vehicle with the *takumi* approach focusing particularly on minimizing noise in the frequencies that interfere with conversation. As an example, Limited and Platinum grades have acoustic glass on the front side windows to further isolate the driver from outside noise.

The seating color palette enhances the sense of luxury permeating the 2021 Highlander. The L and LE grades offer comfortable woven cloth seat surfaces in Graphite or Black; the XLE offers SofTex[®] -trim in Harvest Beige, Graphite or Black, while the Limited offers those colors in perforated leather-trim. The top-of-line Platinum grade, the most luxurious Highlander ever offered, exclusively features embossed, perforated leather-trim in those three colors plus a luxuriously delicious brown called Glazed Caramel.

Multitalented Multimedia

However passengers listen to music and connect with their worlds, the 2021 Highlander is ready with the latest multimedia systems. All grades come standard with Apple Car Play[®], Android Auto[™], and Amazon Alexa compatibility, SiriusXM[®] All Access 3-month trial and a Wi-Fi connectivity trial.

All Highlander models come equipped with Toyota Safety Connect with a one-year trial subscription.

LE and above grades offer Service and Remote Connectivity. The available audio package for the XLE

provides dynamic navigation with a 3-year trial, while the XSE grade and above offer it as standard. A move up to Platinum grade offers the impressive 12.3-inch multimedia screen, which is also available as a package on Limited.

The JBL® Premium Audio System is available as a package on XSE and comes standard for Limited and Platinum grades and rocks music of all genres with 1,200 watts of power playing through 11 speakers in nine locations. Clari-Fi® technology breathes life into compressed digital music formats with the result like a mobile concert. The system will not, however, settle arguments over which music to play.

Safety at Its Core

The 2021 Highlander rides on the TNGA-K platform, along with a suite of standard driver-assist technologies designed to help prevent collisions or to mitigate their impacts.

The 2021 Highlander is equipped with Toyota Safety Sense 2.5 (TSS 2.5+). Blind Spot Monitor (BSM) with Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA) are standard on LE grade and above. Rear Cross Traffic Braking (RCTB) is available with clearance sonar on Limited and above.

The standard backup camera features projected path, while the Limited's backup camera comes standard with dynamic gridlines. A Bird's Eye View Camera with Perimeter Scan, available on Limited and standard on Platinum, provides a live rotating 360-degree view around the vehicle.

The 2021 Highlander is equipped with eight airbags, including side curtain airbags for all three rows. Toyota's Star Safety System includes Enhanced Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRAC), Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist (BA), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), and Smart Stop Technology (SST).

Priced for Value

No matter the grade, every Highlander offers something to suit varying lifestyles, whether it's for a city exploration or a weekend trip to the countryside. With five gas models and five hybrid models, the 2021 Highlander arrives at dealerships with an option for everyone.

Grade	Drive	*MSRP MY21
Highlander L	FWD	\$34,810
Highlander LE	FWD	\$37,010
Highlander XLE	FWD	\$39,810
Highlander XSE	FWD	\$41,405
Highlander Limited	FWD	\$43,765
Highlander Platinum	FWD	\$46,965
Highlander L	AWD	\$36,410
Highlander LE	AWD	\$38,610
Highlander XLE	AWD	\$41,410
Highlander XSE	AWD	\$43,355
Highlander Limited	AWD	\$45,715
Highlander Platinum	AWD	\$48,915
Highlander Hybrid LE	FWD	\$38,410
Highlander Hybrid XLE	FWD	\$41,210
Highlander Hybrid Limited	FWD	\$45,165
Highlander Hybrid Platinum	FWD	\$48,365
Highlander Hybrid LE	AWD	\$40,010
Highlander Hybrid XLE	AWD	\$42,810
Highlander Hybrid Limited	AWD	\$47,115
Highlander Hybrid Platinum	AWD	\$50,315

* MSRP does not include Delivery, Processing & Handling (DPH).

Toyota 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 against perforation from corrosion for 60 months with no mileage limitation. Hybrid-related components that require repairs needed to correct defects in materials or workmanship are covered for 8 years/100,000 miles, whichever comes first from original date of first use when sold as new. The hybrid battery is covered for 10 years/150,000 miles, whichever comes first, and is transferrable across ownership.

The 2021 Highlander also comes with ToyotaCare, a plan covering normal factory-scheduled maintenance, for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first, and 2 years of Roadside Assistance, unlimited mileage.