

Delhi - Apr 22, 2013

The changes aren't immediately apparent in the new Toyota Etios. There are tiny alterations to the grille, lamps and rear-view mirrors and that's because Toyota has worked on small but key tweaks to improve the overall feel of the car.

Open the doors and you'll notice the new two-tone dashboard on this top-end VSP-spec car looks a lot better than the dull grey that characterised the interiors of the earlier one. In fact, the dashboard plastics used are the same as before and you'll see this in the grain used, so it's just the clever selection of colours that makes all the difference. Thankfully, Toyota has dropped that garish red gear knob with tasteful silver finish, which is more in keeping with the car's conservative character.

The central instrument cluster gets icy blue backlighting which, along with the all-new 2-DIN audio system, seriously improves the dull looking, if functional, dashboard. The air-con controls on the previous model have been replaced by solid-looking knobs that have a nice tactile feel. However, automatic climate control, which cars like the Swift and the Micra have, is still not available.

The other area where Toyota has made huge improvements is the seating. The flat and thin seats, which were not impressive in the previous car, have been completely replaced by ones that feel luxurious. The front seats have height adjustment for the driver (on the G model upwards) generous cushioning, lots of under-thigh support and adjustable headrests. Move to the rear and again, you are greeted by a plushness missing in the previous car. The rear seat on the Etios gets bigger fixed headrests. Toyota had saved costs in the previous Etios by not laminating the seats, but this has been changed in the new model, which helps them retain their shape for longer. Other bits that lift the ambience are plusher door pads and the faux wood trim.

Another common complaint about the previous Etios was that it was a rather noisy car. In the new car, the carmaker has remedied this. A special focus was given to lower in-cabin noise and what the new Etios gets is a proper noise, vibration and harshness (NVH) package. This includes a switch from rubber engine mounts to more refined, sound-absorbing hydraulic mounts. The silencer has been modified for better NVH as well, and the damper settings have been fine-tuned to take

All tweaked up

The new Toyota Etios diesel gets a plush look



some of the clunkiness out of the suspension. Subtle changes to the dampers have made this Etios nicer too. There's less suspension noise and the ride has improved considerably. Sharp edges are rounded off well and the suspension is much quieter than before. Still, the damping isn't as progressive as we would have liked – small but sharp vertical movements can be felt over uneven surfaces.

Also the inconsistent steering feel detracts from the driving experience. What remains unchanged is the powertrain. The Etios' diesel motor is a great

engine. It's responsive with very little turbo lag and there's decent mid-range grunt, so it's easy to drive in the city. It's only on the highway or when travelling with a full load that its modest 68bhp comes to the fore. You will need to work the slick, light-action gearbox to keep the engine on the boil in these conditions.

It's clear that there are quantifiable improvements to this car and it injects a much-needed dose of plushness. Hope these changes haven't come a bit too late.

OUSEPH CHACKO

TECHNICAL DATA

Price Rs 8.15 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi)
Length 4265mm
Width 1695mm
Height 1510mm
Wheelbase 2550mm
Engine 4 cyls, 1364cc, turbo-diesel
Power 68bhp at 3800rpm
Torque 17.33kgm at 1800-2400rpm
Gearbox 5-speed manual
Front suspension Independent, MacPherson strut, coil springs
Rear suspension Non-independent, torsion beam, coil springs
Brakes (f/r) Ventilated discs/drums
Tyre size 185/60-R15
Kerb weight 1020kg
Boot 595 litres