

# AUTOCAR

INDIA

VOL.14 NO.8 • APRIL 2013

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### FIRST DRIVE



#### Mahindra e2o

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### FIVE-CAR TEST



#### Automatic mid-sizers

Renault Scala takes on Fiesta, Verna, Rapid and City

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National - Apr 01, 2013



## Re-tios

The Etios and the Liva get a few updates that aim to make them feel more upmarket. How much better are they now?

### FIRST VERDICT

Much needed improvements result in a more complete package.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

### SO GOOD

- Comfortable seats
- Easy to drive

### NO GOOD

- Still lacks flair
- More expensive now

WHEN TOYOTA LAUNCHED the Etios saloon and the Liva hatchback, it was a leap into the unknown. The Japanese car maker had never sold a car that was targeted at the budget end of the Indian market, but just to be sure, Toyota being Toyota, researched every nuance of the customer they never knew. But, as it turned out, Toyota uncharacteristically

miscalculated the high expectations buyers had for the cars that wore its badge.

Toyota simply assumed that Indian customers would be less fussy about a car if it was affordable, and hence used the knife liberally (and a bit too obviously) to strip out costs. But customers, even those buying an entry-level Toyota, have pretty high expectations, and the Etios and Liva's cheap looking cabins and a lack of refinement left them feeling short-changed. And in the face of more earnest competition, the Etios and Liva both have had a tough time finding owners.

The company knew it had to do something to convince buyers that the Etios and Liva were worthy of their money and the two cars you see on these pages are Toyota's attempt at addressing this issue, among others. As you can see from the pictures, the changes aren't immediately apparent (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 cars. Do they make a tangible difference?

Open the doors of either car and you'll notice the new two-tone dashboards on these top-end VSP-spec cars look a lot better than the dull grey that characterised the interiors of the earlier ones. 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 cheap-looking 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 felt quite downmarket in the previous car, have been completely replaced by ones that feel luxurious in comparison.

The front seats have height adjustment for the driver (on the G model upwards) generous cushioning, lots of under-thigh support and adjustable headrests. The fixed headrests were also perceived to be too downmarket.

Move to the rear and again, you are greeted by a plushness that was simply not present in the previous car. The rear seats on the Etios gets bigger fixed headrests, while the Liva gets adjustable ones. Toyota had saved costs in the previous Etios by not laminating the seats, but this has been changed in the new models, which helps



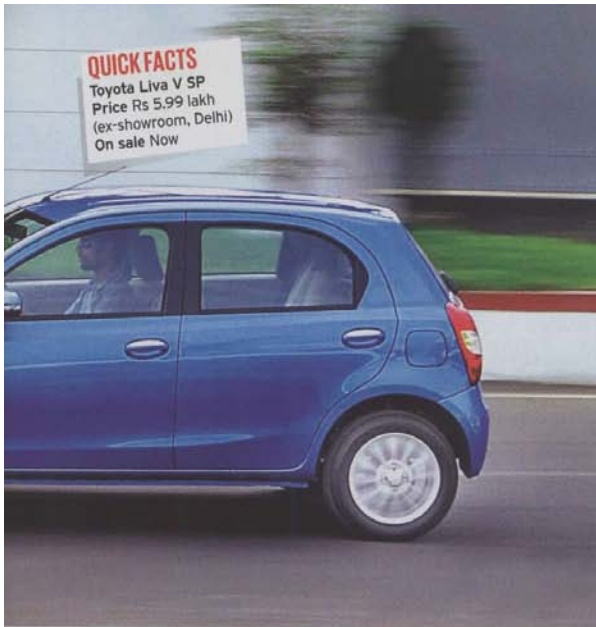
A new Noise, Vibration and Harshness package improves both cars' refinement.



Tweaking the suspension improves ride but damping still nowhere near class best.

PHOTOGRAPHY SOMDATTI NHAWKAR

National - Apr 01, 2013



them retain their shape for longer. Other bits that lift the ambience are plusher door pads and the faux wood trim, which actually looks pretty decent.

Customers complained (and so did we) that the previous Etios was a noisy car, which is something else Toyota took to heart. 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 some of the clunkiness out of the suspension. The net result is that the new Toyotas, especially the diesel versions, are a lot quieter than before.

Subtle changes to the dampers have made the 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 and it's rather evident that the Etios's suspension doesn't have the long travel of the Mahindra Verito. Neither of these cars is particularly exciting to drive either, thanks to low-geared steering racks that have plenty of turns lock-to-lock (about

four, to be precise). However, it's the weirdly inconsistent steering feel that detracts from the driving experience. But, given the Etios and Liva's brief of being practical, easy to live with cars, they are clearly not meant for enthusiasts.

What remains unchanged are the powertrains. This means the Liva's 79bhp 1.2-litre engine and its light kerb weight make for one of the best power-to-weight ratios in the 1.2-litre segment. Still, it's clear that this engine has been tuned for economy rather than outright power. Real progress starts after 2000rpm, it quickens and power builds decently till 4000rpm, and then it tapers off once again into a meek top end. The low-end grunt isn't that impressive either and the engine is quite vocal when it's revved.

As for the Etios's diesel motor, it's a great engine for a car like this. 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.

So, in the end, it's clear that there are quantifiable improvements to both these cars and they inject a much needed dose of plushness. The question is, have these changes come a bit too late?

**OUSEPH CHACKO**

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## FIRST DRIVE

### SPEC FOR SPEC

THE LIVA AND the Etios come in five trim levels. The base Etios J/JD variant comes with body coloured bumpers, air-con, power steering with tilt function, and an immobiliser at Rs 5.45/6.70 lakh. Add full wheel caps, power windows, remote locking, height-adjustable driving seat, two-DIN MP3 player with USB on the G/GD at Rs 5.99/7.07 lakh. The V/VD spec adds alloys, front fog lamps, defogger, tachometer, aux-in and Bluetooth at Rs 6.69/7.76 lakh.

Then there's the SP (Safety Pack) option. The G SP/GD SP get ABS, two airbags, two-tone interiors and fabric door inserts at Rs 6.47/7.55 lakh. The V SP/VD SP get audio controls on the steering, along with two airbags and ABS for Rs 7.08/8.15 lakh.

The Toyota Etios Liva J/JD variants cost Rs 4.46/5.72 lakh. The G/GD come for Rs 4.89/5.99 lakh and the V for Rs 5.60 lakh. The G SP/ GD SP are yours for Rs 5.38/6.38 lakh while the V SP costs Rs 5.99 lakh.

ALL PRICES ARE EX-SHOWROOM, DELHI



Plastic quality is the same as before but lighter colours improve the ambience.



Top variants get 2-DIN audio system.



Gaudy red gearknob is now history.



New seats surprisingly comfortable.



V-spec Liva gets 15-inch alloys.

#### TOYOTA ETIOS LIVA (PETROL)

#### TOYOTA ETIOS (DIESEL)

Price	Rs 5.99 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi)	Rs 8.15 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi)
Length	3775mm	4265mm
Width	1695mm	1695mm
Height	1510mm	1510mm
Wheelbase	2460mm	2550mm
Engine	4 cyls, 1197cc, petrol	4 cyls, 1364cc, turbo-diesel
Power	79bhp at 5600rpm	68bhp at 3800rpm
Torque	10.6kgm at 3100rpm	17.33kgm at 1800-2400rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual	5-speed manual
Front suspension	Independent, MacPherson strut, coil springs	Independent, MacPherson strut, coil springs
Rear suspension	Non-independent, torsion beam, coil springs	Non-independent, torsion beam, coil springs
Brakes(l/r)	Ventilated discs/ drums	Ventilated discs/ drums
Tyre size	185/60-R15	185/60-R15
Kerb weight	930kg	1020kg
Boot	251 litres	595 litres