

PRACTICAL PERFORMER



The Etios, the first India-specific sedan offering from Toyota, is all set to spin its wheels on Indian roads. **Aspi Bhathena**, who test-drove it a few weeks ago, was well pleased with this car built from scratch especially for Indian conditions and Indian car-buyers

FIRST DRIVE TOYOTA ETIOS

THE WORLD'S LARGEST car manufacturer, Toyota, will finally launch their India-specific small sedan on the first of this month. They had displayed both the hatchback and the sedan at the Auto Expo in New Delhi in January 2010 and *CAR India* had mentioned that the sedan would precede the hatch.

Recently we got to see and drive the re-worked Etios sedan for the first time. There have been some minor tweaks here and there to improve the car's looks and to make it sharper than the original one displayed at the Auto Expo.

The first and foremost thing I would like to mention in respect of the Etios is that Toyota have begun this project with a clean slate. They have not used anything from any of their previous models or platforms.

Chief Engineer Yoshinori Noritake san, head of the Etios project, spent five years in India studying local conditions and the Indian users' requirements. The car is not a stunner to look at, nor will it turn heads. It has the typical understated Toyota look instead.

The moment you open the door, you can see the same trend being continued from the exterior to the interior. Practicality and utility is the name of the game. The flat bench-type rear seat, for instance. It may look like a flat plank, but, let me tell

you, it is very comfortable for three persons. You don't keep sliding to the centre and squash the passenger in the middle. The flat floor panel makes life easy for the middle passenger with plenty of leg space.

Up front, the quality of the plastics and the upholstery are good for this segment. The tilt steering of the Etios helps you to tailor the driving position to your liking. The rear leg space is class-leading along with a huge boot. The designers have liberated a lot of usable in-cabin space, including the boot.

The suspension set-up at the front is a straightforward MacPherson strut and the rear is a torsion beam unit. During the short first drive one could immediately make out that Noritake san and his team had put in a lot of effort in setting up the suspension. The car is well-poised with hardly any body roll even when it was driven hard round corners. The steering has a neutral feel and, at the same time, there is plenty of feedback.

As for pothole-ridden bad roads, the Etios came out with flying colours as she took all the speed bumps and obstacles in her stride. The spring rating and damping are well-matched and the ride quality is top class.

As I mentioned earlier, this is an all-new car from ground up and the same goes for the engine as well.

The 1,496-cc, DOHC, 16-valve unit is designed and built specifically for India and for the Etios. Keeping in mind the Indian requirements the engineers have made sure that frictional losses are reduced to give better efficiency as well as power and torque from low rpm. It delivers a maximum of 132 Nm of torque at 3,000 rpm and 90 PS of power at 5,600 rpm. The engine is mated to a five-speed gear box with well-matched ratios that give the car excellent drivability. You can select the fifth gear at 40 km/h and the Etios will happily pull away. So far as I am concerned, what the car does between 1,200 rpm and 2,500 rpm is the most important, for the car will spend more than 90 per cent of its running life in this rev range. Out and out performance like 0-10-100 and top speed are all academic for me.

The 1.5 DOHC is a gem of an engine. The engineers at Toyota have made sure that they kept the weight of the car down to 930 kg without sacrificing safety and, at the same time, achieving a good power-to-weight ratio. Its light weight helps the car in all the departments from performance to fuel efficiency.

After this short drive I can say that this is a no-frills car, but an excellent workhorse that will give its owner hassle-free and reliable service for a long period of time.



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1. The all new 1.5 DOHC engine for the Etios

2. Relaxed and comfortable driving position

3. Meter console is located in the centre with the integrated music system and A/C vents stacked one on top of the other

NEED TO KNOW TOYOTA ETIOS

Price
Rs 5.2 lakh (approx)

Engine
1496cc, 90PS,
132Nm

Transmission
Five-speed manual,
front-wheel drive