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Toyota Yaris: latecomer, can still break up the party

The Verna, City and Gliaz will now face a tough new competitor

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Even for a company whose patient and conservative approach to market entry is legendary, Toyota's decision to set foot into the mid-size sedan segment in India has been inordinately delayed. But, after years of sitting on the fence and allowing rampant speculation by the motoring press about an impending debut, Toyota is finally launching the Yaris this month. The good news is that the company is coming in all guns blazing to take on competition. Though the only munition missing in the Yaris's arsenal will be a Diesel engine.

But, what Toyota will have going for it is the timely, elevated focus on safety and an uncharacteristically well-endowed feature list even for the base trim variant. This is not an overthought, over-engineered product from Toyota. Clearly, the company is conscious of its delayed entry into the segment. Let us hope that this will also show up in the pricing strategy for the Yaris.

Design

The Yaris is an international model, sold in over 60 countries with annual sales in excess of 3,00,000 units. In its third generation, this model is considered a sub-compact overseas, though it is a family sedan for our market. In many markets, the Yaris is also sold both in hatch and sedan body styles, though we will get the sedan



One engine Yaris engine is not really very rev-happy

with a 1.5-litre petrol engine only, with a choice between a six-speed manual transmission or a seven-speed CVT auto gearbox.

The third generation Yaris's design is classic Toyota – nothing radical or too exciting, and yet 'unfaultable'. There is nothing to dislike, though an attempt at aggression when you consider the design of front of the sedan with its oversized, multi-slat lower grille and the large wrap-around headlamps is not carried through the entire car. The rear design is actually elegant and balanced. Split tail-lamps with simple LED signatures are vaguely like the ones in the Camry. In fact, there are lines and shapes around the new Yaris that are Toyota trademarks. Despite its high bonnet line, the design doesn't take on a cab forward flavour, so it is certainly not an awkward-looking sedan. Instead its roofline is steeply sloping at the rear, leading to a stubby boot lid and a mildly coupe-like profile.



Slick shifts Both the manual and the CVT in manual mode are more responsive

The 15-inch alloy rims look a little weak when the Yaris is viewed from the side. The rims and the 185/60 R15 tyres don't quite fill out the wheel arches, but we all know the reasons for Toyota's conservatism when it comes to these choices. Some of the higher trim variants of competing cars like Honda City and Hyundai Verna get 16-inchers.

Cabin

The Yaris gets two-tone interiors; my test mule sported a black and beige combo with matte-silver accents. Toyota also calls the centre stack layout as a waterfall design instrument panel;

topping the stack is a seven-inch LED touchscreen infotainment panel that offers air-gesture control in the top trim 'VX' variant. The Panasonic system is offered with six speakers in the top two trims and four in the lower two (J and G) trims. For connectivity, unfortunately, the system doesn't offer Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, but Miracast, Bluetooth and other wired connectivity options are available. The top trim gets navigation and Mirrorlink with some app usage.

Except the base trim, the other trim variants get automatic air conditioning and the second roof-mounted air vents for distributing cool air from the front to the rear. This is one of the most novel features of the Yaris, and is said to be an exclusive element developed specifically for the Indian market by Toyota engineers. With horizontal, manually adjustable vanes, the unit manages to speed up the process of bringing down the ambient temperature at the rear of the car. Flip the vane down and the extra airflow can help cool down the driver or front passenger's backside.

Knee room and shoulder room is not exactly generous in the Yaris. The Verna may offer a marginally higher amount of knee room, while the City possibly offers more headroom at the rear. The Yaris's sloping roofline cuts into the headroom at the rear, and it will be a tight fit for six-footers. The boot, though, offers a sizeable 476 litres of luggage space. The top trim VX variant also gets perforated leather seats with a mix of real and faux hide.



Two-tone cabin fit and finish quality in the Yaris cabin is very good

The fit and finish quality in the cabin is very good, though not very different in terms of perceived quality compared to the Verna and the City's cabins. Quality of plastic used and other trim are again similar to the competition's.

Performance

Toyota has decided to offer the Yaris with only one petrol engine. The fact that it doesn't get a Diesel engine may be a big miss for the model, even though company officials claim that in this segment, diesels constitute only about 25-30 per cent. It is another very blunt, pragmatic decision that probably has its roots in Toyota's inherent conservatism. Worldwide too, the Yaris is offered with a similar sized or a smaller 1.2-litre petrol engine.

The 1.496 cc, four-cylinder, Dual VVT-i petrol engine in the Yaris makes about 107 PS of peak power and 140 Nm of peak torque. In terms of output, the City and Verna's engines deliver more, but the Yaris is a shade lighter than the Verna. The engine is also not really very rev-happy. It features the same variable valve timing tech as in the Camry, of course with a different tuning cycle for this engine. I first test drove the CVT on the stretch of highway leading out of Bengaluru's airport and then on to winding uphill roads leading up to Nandi Hills.

The engine's power delivery seems to be measured and gradual; it is almost like there is a device restricting heavier throttle inputs. But, essentially the engine's tuning is probably focused on maximising efficiency at lower rpm levels. Once it revs past the 4,000 rpm mark, there is more

power and torque to play with. The other transmission on offer is the six-speed manual gearbox with buttery smooth shifts. Both the manual and the CVT in manual mode (offered with steering mounted paddles) are more responsive, probably because of the possibility of timing the shifts better.

Bottomline

The Yaris's handling is not very different from the other sedans in this segment. The Verna is the one that has really improved in this department about 25-30 per cent. It is another compared to its predecessor. But, the steering in the Yaris is precise and expectedly over-assisted at slow speeds. The suspension, however, is a highlight. Even over really bad roads and at high speeds, the Yaris stays composed.

Overall, the Yaris is a good package and it is commendable that Toyota has chosen to focus on safety and bring it in as standard with seven airbags, ABS with EBD and brake assist. Apart from this, the base variant still doesn't get a lot of equipment, but with the other three trim levels getting a decent spread, there should be a model on offer for many budgets. The claimed mileage figures for the Yaris are 17.1 kmpl for the manual and 17.8 kmpl for the CVT.

Hope Toyota gets its pricing right with the Yaris. I am expecting prices to range from ₹8.5 lakh to ₹13.5 lakh.

