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The Yaris is a brand name that many over here have been wanting Toyota to bring for a while, but the car they're bringing is not the hatchback that you might have seen in Europe but a sedan version that Toyota developed for emerging economies. Now, to prevent confusion, but in reality to confuse you some more, the Yaris as launched in India is actually based on the Toyota Vios and is the same car that Toyota calls the Yaris ATIV in Thailand. But you can carry on about brand names and the logic behind them for hours on end. What matters is that the Yaris is here, it drops squarely into what for years was known as the "City" segment, and carmakers call this the "B High" or "B" segment. Essentially this is a sedan segment where the car length is around 4,400-4,500 mm and while the Yaris is the shortest car in this segment at 4,425 mm, it is not considerably shorter than the competition, and ITV is strangely enough among the wider cars in the segment.

But let's not get into the dimensions battle here, what matters is what is under the bonnet of the car. Interestingly, Toyota Kirloskar Motors has decided not to fit the Yaris with a diesel engine. This might be indicative of the overall pricing direction with fuels that the government has been taking of late but also the fact that when BSIV fuel norms become mandatory on April 1, 2020, emissions norms will mean that smaller diesel engines will become unviable not because of emissions control but because of the additional costs of controlling emissions — the urea injector and the fuel burn required will add on considerable costs to diesel engines. That may not make a difference to cars with larger diesel engines, like the Innova but in smaller diesel cars, the additional 1-1.5 lakh will make them unviable for all but those who drive for hours on end every day.

So long story short, Toyota has fitted the Yaris with a 1.5 litre Variable Valve Timing engine with 108 horsepower. That amount of power, while considerably higher than that of the woefully underpowered Ciaz, falls short of both the City and Verna which have 119 and 123 horsepower from their engines respectively. The power is delivered through a six-speed

manual or a seven-speed stepped Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) unit. A CVT automatic is in theory the most efficient gear system instead of having different gears, where power is delivered to the drive wheels thanks to a system of cones and a band (rubber or metal) connecting them. While a CVT could theoretically deliver a whole range of ratios, they are usually "stepped" that is in this case (as in the Honda City) have seven pre-programmed positions.

Now, while a CVT works excellent for small motors such as those on automatic scooters or larger engines, I have always found CVTs to be a fit off. Sometimes they can be nice, as in the case of the Honda City, but they never feel appropriate when it comes to aggressive acceleration and driving. You constantly find yourself in strange parts of the power range and the power often fluctuates between 3000-4000 revs. This is not unique to the Yaris, you feel the same way in the Baleno CVT. However, much like in Automated Manual Transmission (AMT) vehicles, you have to learn to drive a CVT as well. In a more subtle acceleration environment, the Yaris' CVT becomes quite smooth and the power and speed rise nicely together. So unlike the Verna automatic, which sometimes has a "throw me around" vibe to it, the Yaris is a vehicle that is less get up and go and more, how do I put this, gentle? You can manipulate the CVT using the paddle-shifter and that does make things a lot nicer. However like on the City and the EcoSport, the paddle-shifter is an option only available in the top-specification.

After a few hours of the CVT variant, and Toyota does one smart thing with the CVT here, which is to offer it across all variants, I also got a chance to drive the six-speed manual. Now, I have a strong opinion about six-speed boxes, that is I don't like them. However, I must admit that I'm softening my stand. Partially because I drive a lot of automatics nowadays and also because on the highways, six-speed boxes can deliver incredible amounts of fuel economy because of the low drive ratio of the sixth gear. Both the manual and CVT top-spec VX variant also get a cruise control system, which while not as



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Another mid-size choice in Yaris

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refined as the system on Volkswagen group vehicles, is fairly simple to operate and kept me well below the 80 km per hour highway speed limit.

Handling and ride comfort are par for the course, and on the winding road up to Nandi Hills, the Yaris dealt with the switchbacks, no questions asked. It did not feel like an involved vehicle but it did not feel out of place at any time either. So quite sedate, as was the ride comfort. The Yaris is very comfortable. Sure these were brand-new factory-fresh cars with a suspension that had not faced the rigours of daily driving on some



strong suit. The car's side profile makes it look and feel like a scaled-down Corolla Altis and the rear three-quarter is really the strongest angle to look at this car. The front-on look makes the car look even narrower than it is, it looks squashed actually and not particularly attractive by any stretch. The interior cabin again is not a bad place to be, it is relatively bright with its beige interiors and the dual-tone black and beige interiors don't look bad at all in the VX model. I also drove the fabric interiors of the "V" specification (the manual) and it felt perfectly, how to put this, ordinary. Nothing spectacular at all, but that is a good thing. However, there were indications that Toyota is going to sell this car as "luxurious" and that frankly is a stretch, but that applies to all other cars in this segment. As for rear-loading area, it is very good and the boot is spacious, even leading an auto-writing colleague to comment that it was perfect for a GNG-tank as well as a suitcase.

The Yaris has some great and some not-so-great aspects to its interiors. The great features are things like the flat floor at the rear which makes ingress and egress easier and does not make the person in the middle seat feel like a squashed egg. The second is the ductless, fan-based and roof-mounted air circulation system. This is an ingenious engineering solution that does away with the heavy ducting required for either a centre-console mounted air-conditioning vent or the ducting for ventilated seats (which is still the Verna's single-best feature in my humble opinion). It also takes advantage of basic physics (hot air rises and cold air descends) and low-mounted air-con ducts have the effect of just cooling your knees and your b****s. This solution actually helps the rear passenger and the vent can be directed forward to cool the

driver and front passengers necks as well. In addition, the information cluster has an innovative feature that displays how much fuel you are saving according to your driving style and how that translates into cold hard cash. Of course, to properly test that, one will need to keep the Yaris for a month and see just how much one can save.

The not-so-great? Well, I for one was disappointed in the onboard audio system that Toyota is fitting on the car. Sure, the gesture control feature is great but it is a gimmick given the car does not have support for Apple CarPlay or Android Auto. You can still hook up your mobile device using Bluetooth but I was disappointed with the screen contrast as well. Of course, this can be corrected through an after market kit. In addition another issue was the fact that there is only one USB charging port, that too attached to the audio system on the car. The Verna has two, and believe me when you drive around with your spouse, you should not fight about who should charge their phones. Toyota has put a few 12V charging points but direct USB is the way to go nowadays and I hope Toyota quickly addresses this issue.

So how will the Yaris do? A lot depends on price, but everyone expects the car to be priced between Rs.5-13 lakh. In addition, given that the CVT is available across the range, I do not believe there will be a huge price difference between the manual and automatic, and Toyota can actually change the game for buyers who want a clutchless driving experience. Toyota is also offering seven airbags along with Anti-Lock Brakes as standard across all variants. So on the safety and comfort front, Toyota can easily convert a lot of value-driven buyers in the low-to-mid versions of the segment. Towards higher trim levels, Toyota might face a challenge with better equipped rivals such as the Verna, but this car may not be going after that segment at all. And then there is another thing, the Yaris is perfectly positioned in a slightly larger taxi segment. Keeping in mind that the Etios and Innova are immensely popular with cabbies, the Yaris might just have that segment sewn up already ahead of launch.