

Focus on safety could give Yaris an edge

THE NEW YARIS may boast a couple of segment-first convenience features like a powered driver's seat, and gesture control for its touchscreen, but the real differentiator has come by way of Toyota's focus on safety. In addition to ABS and EBD, the Yaris comes equipped with a class-leading seven airbags (driver, passenger, two side, two curtain and knee) as standard right from the base variant. Also included is an adjustable headrest and a proper three-point seat belt for the rear centre passenger, while high-spec versions get front parking sensors, ESP and hill start assist. And this focus on safety could just be the Yaris' USP.

"People are valuing safety as a basic parameter, not on the basis of price and are willing to pay for it," a senior Toyota official told Autocar India.

The Japanese carmaker observed that, for most car buyers, safety was not a top priority, up until recently. However, this trend is now changing, especially (and surprisingly) in the rural areas. "For instance, in rural India, the first question we are asked by a potential car buyer is how many airbags the vehicle has."

What should also further the Yaris' case for the safety-conscious is its 5-star rating in the ASEAN NCAP crash test. What remains to be seen is how the India car fares under the upcoming Bharat NCAP.

Toyota was among the first mass carmakers in India to standardise dual airbags across its product range, and going ahead, it plans to increase the standard airbag count in the Corolla and the Innova Crysta - both of which get three airbags in base versions.

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Base-spec Yaris gets segment-first seven airbags standard.