



Honda City fighter from Toyota

Toyota's C-segment model, the all-new 2018 Yaris reaches town and we test drive it

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Toyota's compact Yaris nameplate which now represents the fourth model the brand offers in India, is an extremely popular front-wheel-drive car that comes in hatchback and saloon body styles in many countries. Our market gets the saloon variant.

Toyota introduced this name in 1999 as a hatchback originally and in some markets like the Middle East and US it was sold as the Echo.

Third generation models have been marketed since 2011 under the Yaris label and the sedan body style was introduced in 2013.

For our markets the Yaris replaces the Etios and mechanically the model is based on the XP150 Vios (a model sold in South East Asia) with stand-alone design cues. The Yaris is built on the solid bones of the company's tried and tested B-platform which is also shared with the Etios.

It's no secret in the automotive world that cars which were designed as hatchbacks originally and had sedan versions later, the styling may appear quirky as a cut and paste job. If you ask me I can name several of them.

From that perspective, the Yaris saloon we get is actually the facelifted version which is a good looking, pleasantly proportioned car with smart detailing and both front and rear ends are homogenous.

Since it competes with the Honda City, Hyundai Verna and the Maruti Suzuki Ciaz, Toyota has been careful to focus more on the contents, fit, finish materials and trim levels. At 4,425mm in length the Yaris is 15mm shorter than the City, like-wise wheelbase at 2,550mm is 50mm shorter but width is almost same.

At the onset, with my experience with Toyota vehicles since early '90s, I can say they are masters of repackaging. At first glance, the Yaris will get noticed with its distinctive and cab-forward design, longer bonnet raked windshield, sweeping roofline with bulge lines and high rear.

The way the car's waist line rises and meets the boomerang taillamps is a nice example where form meets function. Depending trim level, there's choice of projector headlamps (base) while LED head and tail lamps are only available on the top two variants while LED DRLs are only offered on

the top variant. The Yaris stays connected to the roads via 185/60 R15 tyre/rim combo. We think it could have been inched up as most of the competitors are offering 16-inch combos.

Accommodation in this 4,425mm long car is pretty good for 4-5 adults who also get decent headroom. Seats are shaped to be supportive and padding is comfortable, among the best in the class. Meanwhile, seat backs offer natural sitting position and good lateral support.

What strikes in the cabin that it represents marked improvements in all departments as older generations of the Yaris (not sold here) had a lot of cheap plastics, very basic instrumentation – actually similar to that in the outgoing Etios. Toyota has certainly moved up its game to at least entry-level luxury with a well-laid out pleasant and clutter-free cabin.

The dashboard is two-tone with functional aspects neatly spread out. Driver gets Optitron analogue instruments and digital information centre which is accessed from the steering wheel. Tap through and a variety of information is available including live feed of fuel consumption on the move.

As of now Toyota doesn't offer Android connectivity and the steering adjusts for tilt only so taller drivers may not feel entirely comfortable. The test car had manually adjustable front seats. In higher grades, power seat options are available.

Practical features include 60:40 split folding rear seats, front parking sensors and a large 476-litre boot with detachable liner besides cooling ducts in the glove box to keep beverages cold, USB charging and 12v power point.

Since India is a hot country, the air-conditioning feed for rear passengers has been taken care of quite nicely. Instead of air-ducts from below the front seats or B-pillars (as in MPVs), ducts have been created in the roof liner with flow adjustments.

Power comes from a tried and tested normally-aspirated 1.5-litre four-cylinder normally-aspirated VVT-i engine good for 107hp and 140Nm of torque when mated to six-speed manual transmission. Suspension package is pretty basic with torsion beam and links, but the dampers get longer springs to suit Indian conditions. Safety kit is comprehensive and includes 7 airbags, ABS and EBD.

DRIVING IMPRESSIONS

Start or stop the car's engine by using the push button and engage the short throw gears to move on. The powertrain output is utilised quite well and where it excels is in the higher gears. The sixth gear is usually an overdrive arrangement and helps optimise the car's cruising performance in terms of fuel efficiency. Of course, as with most Toyotas, there's the green Eco indicator that guides you to optimise your driving habits – throttle, braking and gear usage in particular. You can also double check the car's data on the information on the move and it will also summarise it for you.

Since the engine comes with variable valve timing, its torque band allows for more flexibility in delivering low-rpm torque and high-rpm horsepower on demand. The gear shifts are crisp as expected although the clutch is a on the harder side. Suspension appears to have been set up for a similar ride but the damper isolation is good ensuring all-round stability and controlled pitching tendencies. The steering is also a bit heavier, similar in feel to a sports car but isn't as quick as this is a city car. Turn in, overall visibility and blind spot management is good.

Noise management is also impressive, thanks to the use of extra roof insulation and sound deadening glass. No wind or tyre noise was noted apart from the engine when pushed beyond 6,000rpm.

Short turn-in helps the car to be parked in tight spaces and while there are axle sensors to alert you, there's no reverse-camera or visual obstacle guides in the base models. These should have been made standard irrespective of trim.

Braking performance from the front disc and rear drum combo is adequate, but I would prefer it to be a little bit more sharper to the driver's input. Couple of niggles noted – the power mirrors do not fold automatically when car is switched off and the door unlock button is not illuminated.

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT TOYOTA IS A MASTER OF REPACKAGING. BUT IT ALSO HAS TO REALISE THAT COMPETITION IN THE SEGMENT IS INTENSE ON ONE HAND WHILE CONSUMER ASPIRATIONS HAVE MOVED UP. IT WILL HAVE TO PLAY INTELLIGENTLY.

