

Turning the Big 4-0

2023 Toyota 4Runner Celebrates 40 Years of Hitting the Trails

By Derek Price

CARGAZING.COM

It was the year of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean," the final episode of MASH and Darth Vader finding redemption in "Return of the Jedi."

It turns out that 1983 was a landmark year for Toyota, too, with the launch of the 4Runner SUV.

To celebrate the milestone, the 2023 4Runner is available in a 40th Anniversary Special Edition that pays homage to the 1980s off-roader with eye-catching retro stripes.

It gets bronze wheels, special stitching, badges and some other unique bits, too. But it's that yellow, orange and red stripe that stands out like Mr. T's mohawk on this special edition, wrapping from the roofline all the way to the front grille.

Toyota is limiting the production to 4,040 units, fittingly enough.

Aside from reminding us 40-something drivers how ancient we are, there's not much to dislike about this classic Toyota SUV, assuming you buy it for what it's designed to do: serious off-roading.

You can get more comfortable vehicles with better gas mileage by choosing a crossover instead. Toyota makes a lot of good ones.

What set the 4Runner apart from the beginning, though, is the fact that it's a



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legitimate, body-on-frame truck built for serious off-road adventures. Crossovers look the part, but the 4Runner is the real deal.

Its stout frame is designed to take a beating on trails, plus it has the added benefit of delivering a comfortable ride.

The 4Runner is powered by an equally stout, 270-horsepower V6 engine. Still, it can't mask the fact

that this is a portly SUV that requires heavy gas-pedal stomping to bring it up to freeway speeds. It would benefit from Toyota's but-tery turbocharged engines that power the latest Tundra and Sequoia.

You can also feel its truck-based roots in the way it handles. It feels meaty and ungainly with a stiff suspension that constantly reminds you it's built for a purpose,

and that purpose isn't cushy softness.

On the flip side, it has 9 inches of ground clearance in the two-wheel-drive version and 9.6 inches on the 4x4, perfect for its rock-climbing mission.

Personally, I think buyers should ignore the two-wheel-drive version because it defeats the main purpose of driving a 4Runner. People who don't need four-wheel

drive could get dramatically better gas mileage and comfort in a Highlander.

The 4Runner offers two kinds of 4x4 systems. The standard version uses active traction control to sense wheel slippage and deliver power to the wheels that still have traction. It also has a two-speed transfer case that lets you drop it into low range for extreme situations.

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2023 Toyota 4Runner 40th Anniversary (\$46,370)

Wheelbase: 109.8 in.

Length: 190.7 in.

Width: 75.8 in.

Height: 71.5 in.

Engine: 4.0-liter V6 (270 hp, 278 lbs. ft.)

Fuel economy: 16 city, 19 highway

Why buy it?

The Toyota 4Runner remains a beast on the trails with a strong frame, sophisticated 4x4 system and outstanding ground clearance. It's a good choice for people who need more off-road capability than the popular car-based crossovers can deliver.

The 4Runner Limited gets a different 4x4 system that uses a Torsen limited-slip locking differential. For even more capability, the TRD Off-Road and TRD Pro versions offer crawl control, Multi-Terrain Select and special cameras to let you see obstacles on the trail.

Pricing starts at \$38,805 for the base SR5 4x2 version and tops out at \$53,270 for the purposeful TRD Pro. The 40th Anniversary Special Edition, which only comes as a 4x4, is priced at \$46,370.



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Unique numbered badges and bronze-color stitching help the 40th Anniversary Special Edition’s cabin stand out.

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A CLOSER LOOK



AT A GLANCE

FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

What was tested? 2023 Toyota 4Runner 40th Anniversary (\$46,370).

Options: Cargo mat (\$130). Price as tested (including \$1,335 destination charge): \$47,835

Wheelbase: 109.8 in.
Length: 190.7 in.
Width: 75.8 in.
Height: 71.5 in.
Engine: 4.0-liter V6 (270 hp, 278 lbs. ft.)
Fuel economy: 16 city, 19 highway

RATINGS
Style: 6
Performance: 8
Price: 6
Handling: 5
Ride: 7
Comfort: 7
Quality: 8
Overall: 7

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