

CARGAZING



The 2023 Crown, Toyota's replacement for the Avalon, tries to strike a balance between crossovers and sedans with its unique look and layout.

A Perfect Misfit

Sleek Toyota Crown Splits Difference Between Cars, Crossovers

By Derek Price
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As American buyers continue to embrace SUVs and crossovers, car makers are faced with a tough decision: what to do with all the sedan nameplates that aren't selling as briskly as they once did.

Toyota thinks it's found the answer, and it's called the Crown.

Dusting off a name from its history books, the Crown replaces the Avalon in Toyota's lineup as a quiet, soft-riding, somewhat luxurious vehicle for drivers who appreciate supple silence on highway trips. A roomy, squishy, well-equipped vehicle built for comfort seems like a logical replacement.

In many ways, though, the Crown is about as far from the staid Avalon as one could imagine.

With standard all-wheel drive, a tall stance and coupe-like rear end, including a trunk opening instead of a liftback, the Crown is not quite a car and not quite a crossover. It occupies the automotive no man's land in between.

It also is only available as a hybrid.

The base version — which is a bit of a misnomer because it starts with the well-equipped XLE trim — combines electric motors with a gasoline engine to create 236 horsepower. Fuel-economy wonks



The Crown's cabin delivers Toyota's longstanding combination of solid build quality and logical, practical orientation of switches and storage spaces.

in Washington rate it for 42 mpg in city driving and 41 on the highway, both eye-popping numbers for a vehicle this spacious.

If you want better performance, the Platinum version comes with the HYBRID MAX powertrain that creates a beefy 340 horsepower, albeit with correspondingly worse fuel economy. It gets a rating of 29

mpg in the city and 32 on the highway.

My tester, a Platinum Crown with two-tone paint, drove a lot like the last Avalon, and I mean that as a compliment. It's an excellent highway cruiser with enough noise insulation to make it sound like a coffin inside.

Despite Toyota's insistence that

this is a "performance hybrid," it's more relaxing than exhilarating, even with all the added horsepower. Standard adaptive suspension on the Platinum grade helps with the quiet ride and silky feeling on road trips.

As a frequent critic of look-alike crossovers and boring Toyota sedans in the past, I've got to say

I'm pleasantly surprised with how imaginative the Crown is. Toyota's designers took a risk with this car — or SUV, or whatever you want to call it — and the overall look is striking from any angle. It has the sleek shape of a compact sports coupe, just blown up 50% bigger and fitted with four wide-swinging doors.

The result is a vehicle that turns heads while also being eminently practical. The lifted right height makes it easy to slide into the seats and see traffic on the road.

If I could change one thing about it, it would be the rear cargo opening. I'd love to give the Crown a liftgate where the entire rear glass raises up to load big, bulky cargo, one of the key reasons people are buying SUVs and crossovers more than sedans.

As it is, the trunk is spacious but not as versatile as a crossover. Volkswagen's Arteon provides a good design study on how it can be done well.

Other than that caveat, the Crown is a solid choice for Toyota shoppers who want a premium driving feel, assuming they like its unorthodox styling.

Pricing starts at \$39,950 for the XLE, \$45,550 for the Limited, or \$52,350 for the more powerful Platinum.

A CLOSER LOOK



AT A GLANCE

FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

What was tested? 2023 Toyota Crown Platinum (\$52,350). Options: Premium paint (\$425), two-tone paint (\$550), cargo net (\$49), side puddle lamp (\$165), key glove (\$20). Price as tested (including \$1,095 destination charge): \$54,654

By The Numbers

Wheelbase: 112.2 in.
Length: 196.1 in.
Width: 72.4 in.
Height: 60.6 in.
Power: 2.4-liter four cylinder plus dual electric motors (340 combined system horsepower)
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Fuel economy: 29 city, 32 highway

RATINGS

Style: 9
Performance: 6
Price: 7
Handling: 5
Ride: 9
Comfort: 8
Quality: 8
Overall: 7

Why buy it?

A quiet highway ride, spacious cabin and excellent fuel economy from a hybrid drivetrain make the Crown perfect for buyers who value logic and comfort. Its imaginative styling turns heads.

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