

Entering the Fray

After Dominating Hybrid Sales, Toyota Releases Its First EV

By Derek Price

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Given its head start in hybrid cars, selling more than 20 million so far around the world, one might assume Toyota would be a leader in battery-powered cars, too.

So far, that hasn't been the case.

Now that Tesla is selling more than a million EVs each year and roughly six percent of new cars sold in America are fully electric, Toyota is entering the fray.

Was it wise or foolish to wait on the electric-car market to mature? There are good arguments on both sides, but we'll soon know the answer now that Toyota has birthed its first EV, the 2023 bZ4X.

In many ways, the bZ4X is exactly what one would expect from a battery-powered Toyota. It has the same flawless assembly, solid-feeling cabin and quiet, refined ride that made Toyota one of the most successful car companies on the planet.

In one big way, though, it's already behind the competition: DC charging speed.

This isn't a problem for buyers who plan to only charge their bZ4X in the garage and use it for local trips. But on longer road trips, when DC fast chargers let you top it up quickly to continue on your way, it's going to be a problem.

The front-wheel-drive ver-



Toyota's first electric vehicle, the bZ4X, is rated for up to 252 miles of range. It mixes sharp styling with a practical, family-friendly SUV-style layout.

sion is rated for a maximum of 150 kW. The all-wheel-drive version — the one I tested for a week — maxes out at 100 kW, according to Toyota's spec sheet.

In the real world, my charging speed never came close to those numbers. After trying several different DC fast charging locations, the most I ever saw it draw was around 60 kW, which is about a third of what I've seen from most of its com-

petitors.

As the battery gets closer to fully charged, the speed slows to a crawl. That's normal for EVs, but it's especially pronounced in this one.

The good news is that if you have a second car for road trips, the bZ4X is a spectacularly comfortable and stylish way to drive around town. I think it's the best-looking SUV-style vehicle Toyota makes thanks to its sharp lines, two-tone

fenders and rakish rear end.

It's also practical for families with busy lives. Its 27.7 cubic feet of cargo capacity is slightly more than the Hyundai Ioniq 5, perhaps its closest competitor, and it's filled with smartly designed storage spaces and easy-to-use controls in typical Toyota fashion.

From the driver's seat, it's obvious what the designers were thinking about when creating this car: visibility.

The digital instruments and main touchscreen are both placed up high, making it easy for the driver to keep their eyes on the road.

Its instrument pod behind the steering wheel has an especially unusual layout. The steering wheel seems to fit a bit low compared to most cars, and the instruments are placed up above it, right at the windshield line, which makes perfect logical sense but is rare to

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2023 Toyota bZ4X AWD Limited (\$48,780)

Wheelbase: 112.2 in.

Length: 184.6 in.

Width: 73.2 in.

Height: 65 in.

Powertrain: Dual 80-kW electric motors (214 total system horsepower)

Efficiency: 102 MPG equivalent

Range: 222 miles

Why buy it?

It's Toyota's first EV, offering the brand's solid construction and reputation for durability. It has excellent visibility from the driver's seat and decent range of 252 miles with front-wheel drive.

see in a car.

Pricing starts at \$42,000 for the front-wheel-drive version, which is the one I'd recommend because of its faster charging capability and longer range of 252 miles. It makes 201 total system horsepower, Toyota claims.

The all-wheel-drive version starts at \$44,080 and makes slightly more power but has a lower rated range. The horsepower is 214 and EPA-rated range is 228 miles.

Pricing tops out at \$48,780 for the Limited AWD grade before options.

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The bZ4X's cabin is designed for excellent visibility from the cabin, including screen and instrument placement that make it easy for the driver to keep their eyes on the road.

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A CLOSER LOOK



AT A GLANCE

FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

What was tested? 2023 Toyota bZ4X AWD Limited (\$48,780).

Options: Premium audio system (\$580), limited weather package (\$350), special color (\$425), split roof rear spoiler (\$200), two-tone paint (\$500), carpet floor mats (\$269), mud-guard (\$149). Price as tested (including \$1,215 destination charge): \$52,468.

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Powertrain: Dual 80-kW electric motors (214 total system horsepower)

Efficiency: 102 MPG equivalent

Range: 222 miles

RATINGS

Style: 9

Performance: 6

Price: 6

Handling: 6

Ride: 7

Comfort: 8

Quality: 9

Overall: 7

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