

Toyota Auris Range

# What's in a Name?



This is where Toyota gets serious. The Auris is the marque's new family hatchback and if you're shopping amongst Focus and Astra models, it's a car you can't ignore.

This was a car set out to be a class leader in every respect. Take safety. It's the safest car in its class, having been awarded a best possible 5-star crash safety rating from Euro NCAP. More of that later.

First however, you need to know that the Auris is very different to anything Toyota has offered in this sector before, running on a completely new platform designed with European markets in mind. Designed and built in Europe, this model follows on from the success enjoyed by the marque's Verso model, a car built specifically to European tastes. It forms the vanguard of a three-pronged assault, backed up by the Avensis and Yaris, that spearheads Toyota's quest to achieve 1.2 million sales annually across Europe by 2008.

So how does the Auris stack up? Well, we know going in that it's going to be as reliable as an atomic clock, supremely well built, ruthlessly practical and cost effective to run. But it's also much, much more. Toyota claims a whole series of clever design features and if these can really be backed up by the usual virtues of reliability, strong residual values and exemplary safety provision, then this car could make real inroads in the Ford Focus-dominated Family Hatchback sector.

In creating the Auris, Toyota's engineers started with the passengers and then worked outwards, maximising occupant space with elements such as a flat passenger floor and high window

surfaces. The all-new platform has an overall length of 4,220mm incorporating a 2,600mm wheelbase. This means that the wheelbase represents 61.6 per cent of the car's total length. The higher the percentage, the more space is afforded to people rather than oily bits. By contrast, the current Ford Focus, a model which is generally seen as an exemplar of smart packaging in this class, has a 58.5 per cent wheelbase to length and even something like the latest SEAT Leon manages a mere 59.7 per cent figure. With an overall height of 1,515 and a width of 1,760mm, the Auris is one of the biggest family hatches around, although the shape does much to disguise this bulk.

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Credit for the design work goes to Toyota's ED2 studio in France and claims to follow the principles of Toyota's 'Vibrant Clarity' design philosophy. A decent job has been done, based on the Auris Space Concept that was shown at the Paris Auto Salon in 2006.

Both three and five door bodystyles are offered along with a range of five engines. The two petrol engines comprise a 96bhp 1.4 VVT-i unit and a 122bhp 1.6-litre Dual VVT-i powerplant that raises fuel efficiency and power output compared to the Corolla's 1.6-litre mill. Diesel buyers get to choose from three engines. The entry-level lump is the 1.4-litre D4-D, good for 89bhp.

Customers then step up to a 2.0-litre D4-D 130 engine which despite its name has a power output of 124bhp and was first seen in the 2007 Avensis. Given that it drove this hefty car around with ease, it should make an Auris respectably brisk.

At the top of the range is the 2.2-litre D4-D 180 which churns out 175bhp and is one of the best compact diesel engines around, offering fully 36bhp more than its 2.2-litre diesel rival, the Honda Civic. Six speed manual transmissions are fitted as standard to the two more powerful diesels but a MultiMode system with paddle shifters is offered as an option for the 1.4-litre D4-D 90 and the 1.6-litre Dual VVT-i engines.

Which leaves that issue of safety, a vital one for any car seeking success in this sector to crack. Look at the facts and it's soon clear that the Auris didn't achieve its Five Star Euro NCAP safety rating by accident. The combination of a driver knee airbag and a collapsible steering column were key factors in the 35 point, 5-star result for adult occupant protection. A 'Minimal Intrusion' cabin design and up to nine airbags boost its safety rating from the start and contribute to the 4-star performance this car also achieved for child occupant protection. Another key benefit in this respect is the way that ISOFIX anchorage points have been included on the outer rear seats. Euro NCAP also awarded Toyota a class-leading three out of four-star rating for pedestrian protection.

Overall? Well, the Toyota Auris faces a very tough task if it's to fulfil Toyota's demanding expectations but don't bet against it. This needs to be a car that the world's biggest vehicle manufacturer can be proud of - and asks don't come much bigger than that. ■