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The Avalon's interior has been upgraded for 2011 with more features than ever before at a price \$4,745 below the similar 2010 model.



Toyota Avalon a bargain

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From the addition of more chrome on the front grille and side rocker panels, to high-tech projector headlamps with light pipes and rear tail lamps with LED light pipes, the Avalon for 2011 has a much more modern look to it. Other new features include foldable heated power side mirrors with LED turn signal, 17-inch polished alloy wheels and prominent dual exhaust pipes.

The Avalon is Toyota's most North American vehicle. The restyling was carried out at Toyota's California design studio. While the Corolla, Matrix and RAV4 (all built in Canada) account for 50 per cent of Canadian sales, Toyota prides itself in offering a car for all tastes.

So for those who want a sophisticated sedan full of all the latest in technology, the Avalon is it, designed and built in North America for a North American audience.

Overall, it has significant enhancements for 2011; with many of them in the revamped interior that isn't flashy but has a distinctly Lexus-like feel to it.

Power for this front-wheel drive vehicle comes from a 24-valve, 3.5-litre DOHC V6 engine, making 268 hp and 248 lb/ft of torque. This is the same engine offered in the upscale Camry models.

The V6 is mated to a six-speed automatic transmission and it is equipped with the latest valve-control mechanism to provide a broader power band, while at the same time requiring less fuel and generating fewer emissions.

As far as fuel economy is concerned, the Avalon is rated by Natural Resources Canada at 10.6L/100 km (27 mpg) city and 6.8L/100 km (42 mpg) highway for a combined 8.9L/100 km (32 mpg).

Inside, one of the highlights of the Avalon is the amount of rear seat legroom. Three passengers fit comfortably in the rear seats and the wide door openings and flat floor area make entry and exit a breeze.

The rear seats also recline slightly, a feature unique to Avalon in the segment. There is a pass-through to the trunk, but the rear seats do not recline to add to the generous trunk capacity.

Meanwhile, all seating surfaces are leather, heated in front and with eight-way power adjustments for the driver's seat. There is also a driver's memory with two settings.

The revised dash sports a new instrument panel with easy-to-read Optitron

gauges featuring white illumination with white pointers.

While the owners of current Avalons are generally older, they like their technology and Toyota decided to package almost all its available technology in this model. So, it features Bluetooth hands-free phone and music streaming to the audio system from a compatible device, XM satellite radio (six months free) and both USB and auxiliary connections for iPod and other audio devices.

It also has a DVD-based touch screen navigation system and a back-up camera. Steering wheel controls monitor the audio, HVAC, Bluetooth and climate functions.

Although this is a big-body, full-size sedan, safety features aren't forgotten. There are seven airbags including the segment's only driver's-side knee airbag. Active front headrests and redesigned rear headrests are included as are Vehicle Stability Control, traction control, ABS with Electronic Brake Force Distribution and Brake Assist.

The trunk even has a full-size spare tire on an alloy wheel and each wheel has its own air pressure sensor.

As far as packaging is concerned, what you see is what you get. Toyota has decided to offer the Avalon for 2011 in the upscale XLS trim only in Canada.

That model accounted for 60 per cent of sales for 2010 and was priced at \$4,745 more than the incoming car. So the Avalon presents quite a bargain when you consider it's not much more than a fully-loaded V6 Camry and less than the starting price for a Lexus ES 350.

That's why Toyota hopes to capture some move-up buyers from the Camry as well as others who want an entry-luxury vehicle with all the toys but without the flash of some of the competition. For this type of buyer, the Avalon may just do the trick.

TOYOTA AVALON 2011 AT A GLANCE

BODY STYLE: four-door premium sedan.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, front-wheel drive.

ENGINE: 24-valve, 3.5-litre DOHC V6 (268 hp, 248 lb/ft of torque).

FUEL ECONOMY: 10.6L/100 km (27 mpg) city, 6.8L/100 km (42 mpg) highway, combined 8.9L/100 km (32 mpg).

PRICE: \$41,100.

WEB SITE: www.toyota.ca