

Larger Prius v takes on classic liftback

By Neil Moore
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When Prius launched in Japan back in '97, coming here three years later, it went on to define the hybrid segment.

Others soon followed, like Honda Insight and the company's more conventional Civic hybrid, but somehow Toyota's awkwardly styled humpback hatch became the icon for green motoring.

I drove one again in January, and will admit that although I'm not enamoured with the look or performance, this vehicle does have advantages.

Firstly, it's great on fuel - but you already knew that. For a reasonably roomy 4/5-passenger hatchback, Prius gets a frugal 4.6/4.9/4.7 L/100 km (city/hwy/comb).

That's better than the Civic and Ford C-Max hybrids, which are closely matched in size.

It is also well equipped for its \$26,205 base price. Along with the usual stuff, like air conditioning, power windows and locks, and tilt/telescopic steering, the entry car provides a backup camera, smart key with pushbutton start, Bluetooth, automatic climate control and six-speaker audio with 6.1-inch display.

My tester was the \$31,190



The Prius v is not only larger than its liftback cousin, but wears a more conventional wagon/hatchback design.

"Touring" model that added navigation, upgraded infotainment, heated seats with eight-way power adjust for the driver, auto leveling headlamps, 17-inch alloys and more.

But there are shortcomings, aside from styling.

Prius liftback's interior skimps on such niceties as soft touch surfaces and metallic

accents. At least the abundance of hard plastic is grained and low-gloss, and I like the floating centre stack with felt-lined storage below.

That aside, I believe this Prius's greatest competition isn't from other automakers, but from within the company lineup.

My week with the liftback was followed by one in the Prius v, which starts at only \$1,785

more, but will carry significantly more boxes, hockey bags and other family gear.

It's a relative newcomer to the Prius stable, arriving here in late 2011, but the "v" has already surpassed the original in terms of yearly sales.

One reason would be its size. The wheel

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