

Toyota Corolla - the most popular model ever produced

By JIM ROBINSON
Special to the Independent/Free Press

What's the most popular model car ever produced?

If you said Ford Model T or Volkswagen Beetle you'd be close, but it is the Toyota Corolla that holds the record.

In 1998 Toyota sold a record number (40,773) units in Canada.

Last year's Corolla was the eighth generation and all new. It was larger and held the line on weight, while standardizing on the 1.8-litre engine that was made more fuel efficient.

Corollas are built in Cambridge, Ont. and in 1999 they come in three versions, the entry level VE, the mid-range CE and the amply-equipped LE.

Tested here is the CE, my choice if I was buying one. That's because it comes ready to roll with four-speaker stereo, 60/40 rear split seats (with releases inside the trunk for anti-theft purposes), an outside temperature gauge (no less) and built with typical Toyota attention to quality for \$17,705.

All three Corollas begin life with an extensive list of standard equipment like color-keyed bumpers, cup holders front and rear, driver's dead pedal, adjustable anchors in the B-pillars for the front driver and passenger both of whom get airbags and the rear seats also have head restraints for safety's sake.

Also standard are remote releases for the trunk and fuel door, carpeted cargo area, tilt steering wheel, tachometer and front and centre console box. I like the little oddments doors on the instrument panel to the left of the steering wheel that can hold a wallet.

The VE and CE are fitted standard with a five-speed

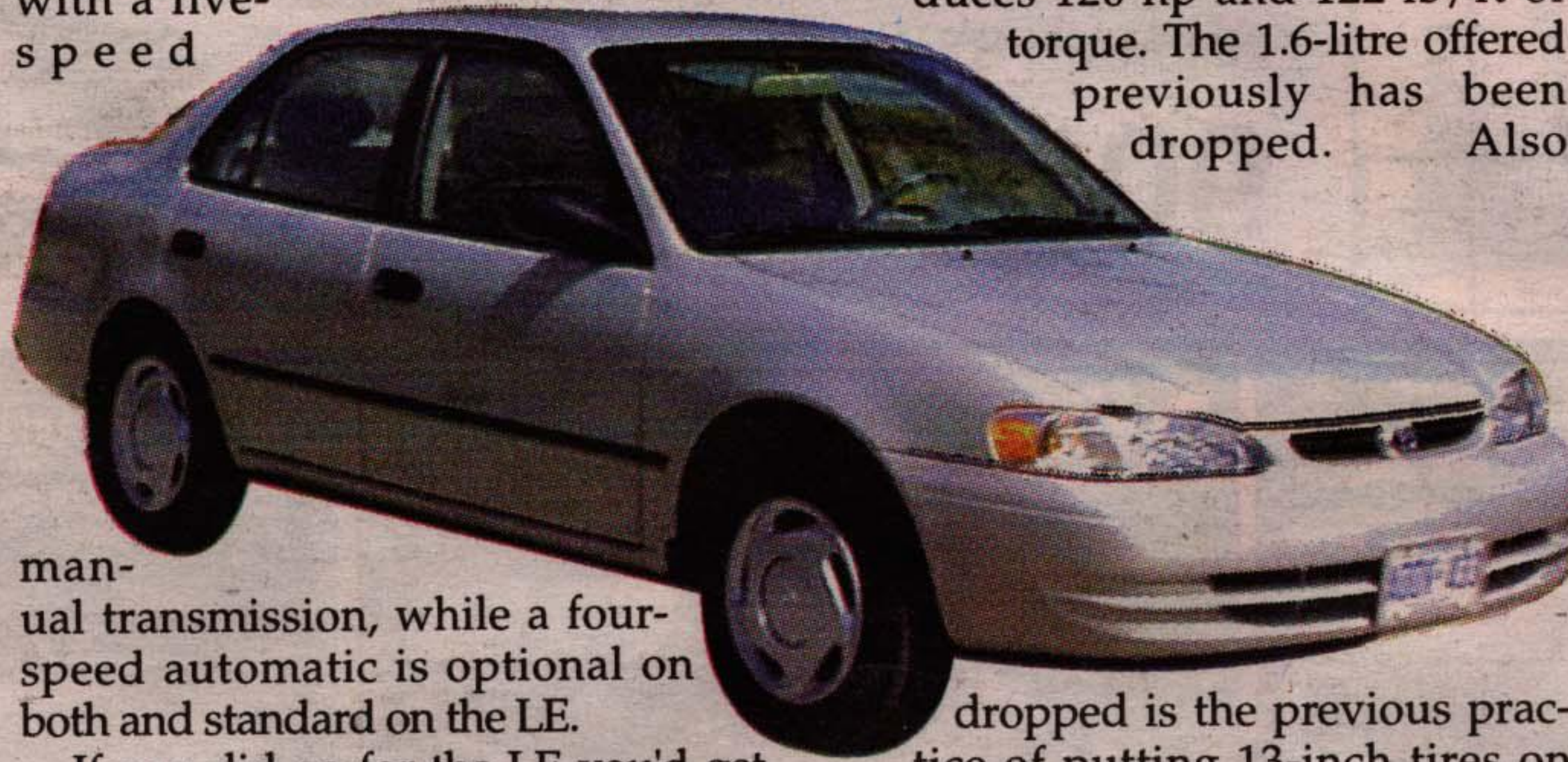
man-ual transmission, while a four-speed automatic is optional on both and standard on the LE.

If you did go for the LE you'd get power windows and locks, power remote mirrors, full-size spare tire and slightly wider tires. Sounds good but you'd also be paying a MSRP of \$20,070 as opposed to the \$17,705 (including the automatic) for the basic CE. How did the 1999 Corolla CE as tested here get to \$19,450? Because it was delivered with Option Package B (\$1,615) that included air conditioning, cruise control and intermittent wipers.

Canadian Corolla buyers also get a

front stabilizer bar standard as well as three-jet nozzles for the windshield washer coupled with a low washer fluid warning system. Also available in Canada only on the CE are power locks, available without ordering power windows.

All Corollas are fitted with the 1.8-litre 16-valve four-cylinder that produces 120 hp and 122 lb/ft of torque. The 1.6-litre offered previously has been dropped. Also



dropped is the previous practice of putting 13-inch tires on entry-level Corollas.

The suspension system is MacPherson struts fore and aft with the rear getting lower link arms. Coil springs are used at all four corners. Braking is disc front and drums rear. Anti-lock brakes are only available on the LE. Power steering is standard and is made better by having variable assist.

With a curb weight of 1,135 kgs (2,502s lbs.) as tested and 120 hp, the

Corolla has spirited acceleration that allows it to blend with highway-speed traffic from an on-ramp with little fuss or wailing of exhaust.

What is noticeable almost immediately, and something Toyota is nearly obsessive about, is the elimination of noise and vibration. Extra wads of asphalt insulation and double rubber seals on the doors are just two of the many details added to avoid intrusions in the passenger cabin area.

Being a Toyota it teems with little conveniences for the occupants. These include heat ducts to the rear seats, a glove box big enough to hold a camera and nice big rotary heating/ventilation dials that can be adjusted even if you're wearing thick gloves. Readers, I am sure, are tired of hearing me carry on about the quality of Toyota plastics and materials, but they do set a benchmark.

The rigidity of the chassis, which sets new standards even for Toyota, gives this compact car the bank vault feel of a much larger sedan.

But even better is the fuel economy that gives a Transport Canada tested rating of 49 mpg on the highway in the five-speed and 47 mpg in the automatic as tested here.

Lastly, Toyota quality that results in high resale value is the bonus and one good reason why more than 40,000 Canadians stepped up to buy one last year.

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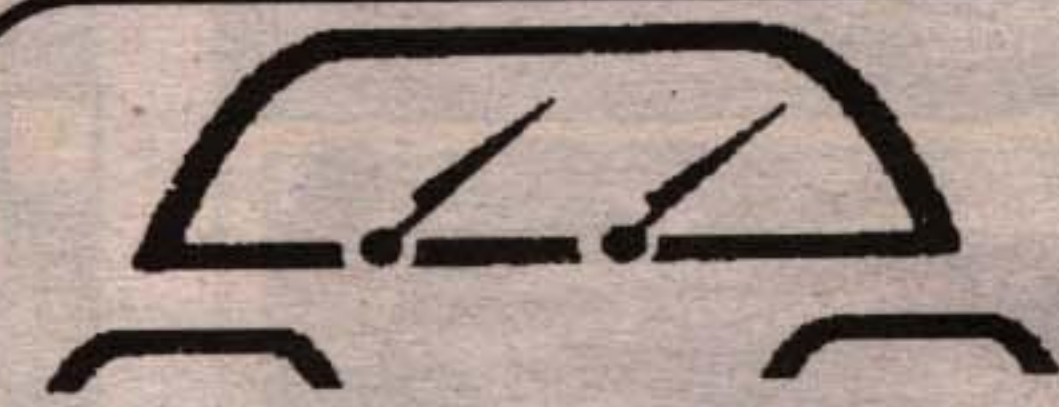
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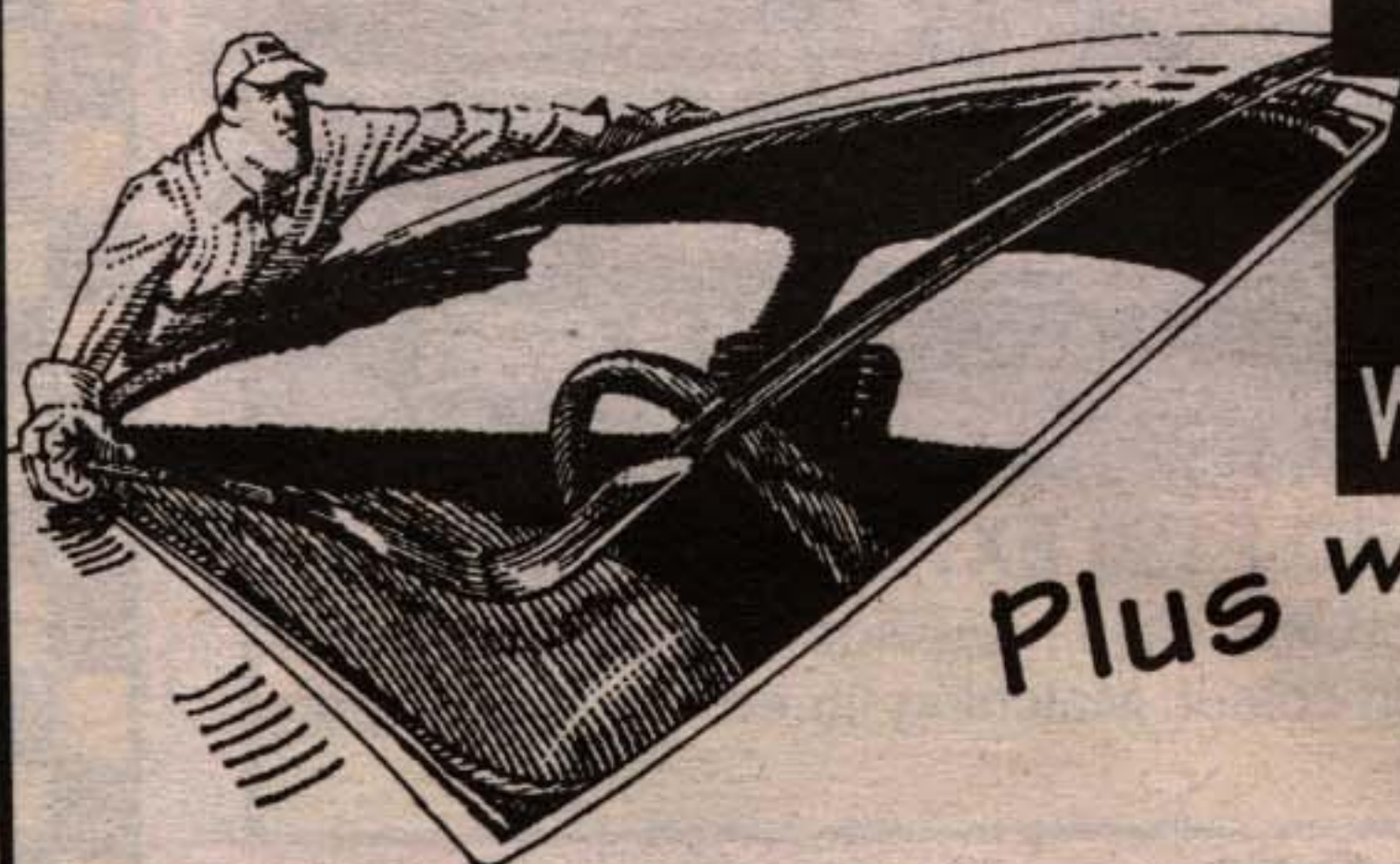
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