

Toyota's 2009 RAV4 SUV has a very big Canadian connection

JIM ROBINSON
Metroland Media Group
www.yourautos.ca



The 2009 Toyota RAV4 features a number of mid-cycle changes and is now being produced at Toyota's huge new assembly facility in Woodstock, Ont.

Photo by Jim Robinson

All RAV4s come with what Toyota calls its Active Torque Control four-wheel-drive that is actually more of a "slip and grip" all-wheel-drive system that has a coupling placed just in front of the rear differential. Based on where the sensors find traction is the best, the coupling is electromagnetically activated if torque to the rear as is needed. In most cases, the RAV4 will be running in a front-drive mode and that, in turn, helps conserve fuel consumption.

The four-cylinder can tow up to 1,500 lb and the V6, 3,500 lb.

The 2009 RAV4 was launched in Windermere in the heart of Muskoka in what should have been a glorious fall setting if it hadn't been for a day of grey skies and intermittent rain, heavy at times.

One of the exercises to show off how much more virile the new 2.5-litre is, involved a closed stretch of road with a 2.5-litre in front of a 2.4-litre. The object

was for both drivers to hit the gas pedal at the same time to see how much better the newer engine performed. Well it wasn't dramatic, but the 2.5-litre did have the legs on the 2.4-litre.

Roads in this part of the world are heavily crowned so all the water from snow and rain can wash off swiftly. But this also means you can't lose concentration because frost heaves and rashes of cold patching can yank the steering out of your control.

Luckily, all 2009 RAV4s are equipped with Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) incorporating traction control. This is integrated with electric power steering for surprising precise steering. With all systems working, there was no sense of getting out of shape.

In adverse conditions like heavy snow or ice, a switch can turn off the VSC.

Braking is by four discs with ABS, electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist.

On the wet Muskoka roads, that RAV4 stopped and cornered as you expect but with the short wheelbase and the relatively high seating position, taking hard corners at anything about the speed limit would have foolhardy. There was slight body lean but nothing untoward, such is the sophistication of today's road holding technologies.

Now on sale across Canada, the base 2.5-litre RAV4 carries a starting price of \$26,500 with the Sport starting at \$30,165 and Limited at \$31,635. Suggested starting prices for V6-equipped models are the Base at \$29,100, Sport at \$31,920 and Limited at \$33,890.

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