

# WHEELS

## Toyota Echo is willing to go

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that allows front and rear headroom of 39.9 inches. The other payoff is in shoulder room with 52.5 inches in the front and 51.9 inches in the back seat.

While sitting high, the car is very slick in the wind with a coefficient of drag of just 0.29.

Compare that to the super slippery, looking Audi TT Quattro that had a C.d. of 0.34.

That shape plus a marvelous engine give preliminary fuel efficiency ranges of 7.0/5.5/6.3L/100 km city/highway/combined for the five-speed manual version and 7.4/5.6/6.6L/100 km city/highway/combined for the four-speed automatic.

This is all thanks to Toyota's new VVT-i vari-

able valve technology. In 1.5-litre form, the engine produces 108 horsepower and 105 ft/lb of torque. With the Echo weighing in at just 980 kilograms, it combines with the fuel rating to allow this car to be certified as a low-emission vehicle by Transport Canada.

Echo even has a two-way muffler with a by-pass valve that stays closed at low speeds for quieter operation.

There are two transmissions including the five-speed manual as used in the current Tercel. The other is a electronically controlled four-speed automatic with Uphill Shift Logic.

Front suspension is long-stroke MacPherson strut with steering rack mounted to the sub frame. The rear is a twist beam with gas shocks and coil springs low mounted to include interior space. Braking is via vented discs at front, drums at the rear.

While the Echo looks very 21st century from the outside, the interior let you know it for sure. Right in the top centre of the dashboard is the instrument cluster. It contains the speedo, trip odometer, fuel gauge and warning lights for things like coolant temperature.

With the Echo, Toyota has reset the mark for subcompact carmakers who will have to focus their attention on the trend being set.

Having grown up on gauges viewed through the steering wheel, the centre cluster is something you adapt to in seconds. Better, because it is set higher set, you don't have to avert your eyes as low to check your speed while driving.

The centre console houses the controls for air conditioning, audio system and digital clock. Three round knobs make heating/cooling easy to select and four round vent/exhaust ports on the dash flood the cabin with air movement.

There are storage bins on either side of the central console, beneath the dash board for the driver and there is even a little hidden tray under the passenger seat. There are not one, but two glove boxes plus a centre slot above the radio for your 407 transponder. There is a large, easy-lift trunk lid and 60/40 split back seats that open up a reasonable trunk of 13.6 cu. ft.

I drove both the two-door with automatic and four-door sedan with five-speed and was immediately impressed by the willingness of the car to get going.

Credit the light weight, the wind-cheating shape and the sheer cheekiness of the entire package, but it was fun to drive this car.

The view, thanks to tall windows, a proper seating position and the higher viewpoint of the road made for clear sailing without a noticeable blind spot.

The Echo shows what can be done when a carmaker makes a determined effort to put everything it has into establishing a new benchmark.

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