

WHEELS

Toyota Prius goes on sale this summer

Toyota's Prius hybrid powered sedan goes on sale in Canada this summer as a 2001 model.

Using the Toyota Hybrid System (THS), Prius is the world's first mass-produced gasoline-electric hybrid automobile. Since it went on sale in Japan in 1997, Toyota has sold over 30,000 while refining it in preparation for introduction to Europe and North America this summer.

The five-passenger Prius four-door sedan will be a feature at the Toyota display at major Canadian auto shows this winter.

"As Toyota enters the 21st century, it is our responsibility to make every effort to reduce the impact that our automobiles have on the environment," said Yoshio Nakatani, president of Toyota Canada Inc. "But in order to bring it into mass production, we also had to make it a practical car for everyday use, a car that is comfortable, safe, roomy and fun to drive."

To achieve that, Toyota has made some significant changes to Prius from the car that went on sale in Japan in 1997, and which Canadians saw when it was previewed at last year's Canadian auto shows.

Primary power for Prius is provided by an efficient 1.5 litre gasoline engine. Peak power for the engine in Japanese-market trim is 58 hp at

4,000 rpm, with peak torque of 75 lb/ft also reached at 4,000 rpm. The engine is equipped with variable valve

timing with intelligence (VVT-i), which helps maximize efficiency and minimize emission.

Canadian-specification models will have an increase in horsepower and torque to better handle higher-speed driving conditions. Final mechanical specifications and fuel mileage figures for these updated models will be available at a later date.

Prius is powered by either the gasoline engine or the electric motor or both together, determined by the para-

meters in the vehicles operating software. Operation of the system is seamless. The transition between the gasoline and electric power plants is virtually imperceptible to driver and passengers.

Prius was styled at Calty Design Research, Toyota's Southern California design studio in Newport Beach. It combines the short overhangs and large, relatively upright cabin necessary for a newly designed city vehicle.

The suspension is fully independ-

ent. MacPherson struts in the front incorporate an L-beam lower control arm. The rear is fitted with a torsion-beam axle with toe-control links, which allows for a large trunk and rear-seat capacity while not sacrificing ride or handling compliance.

Standard equipment will include automatic air conditioning, power windows, door locks and mirrors, cruise control and security alarm system.

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