

2000 Toyota Avalon

The third car I ever road tested for these pages was a 1988 Toyota Cressida that pretty well summed up the concept of "value added" as it then applied to Japanese cars.

Instead of three pages of options for your 1998 Chevy Caprice or Dodge Diplomat, here was a family car fitted out like a luxury car at a very attractive price. The concept of air conditioning, power windows, locks and seats and antenna as standard was pretty radical back then. Many people who owned Cressidas still wish they had them. But when Toyota created Lexus, keeping a Cressida around didn't make much sense when the idea was to have buyers step up from a Camry to a ES250 or ES300.

But many North Americans still like cars that seat five comfortably. These are not so much luxury cars as big cars like Intrepid and Crown Victoria. This was seen as an opportunity by Toyota which created the Avalon some five years ago. It was really a stretched Camry with body changes. But what we marveled at then was the car grew by five inches, but the curbweight remained virtually the same as Camry - no small feat.

For 2000, Avalon has evolved to be roomier, quieter, and more refined. Avalon is being aimed at mature buyers who are looking to make a "smart" purchase that gives them "a little more" if they are moving up from Camry or Accord.



The topline 2000 Toyota Avalon is only 25 mm wider but it has changed the looks substantially.

Little things can mean a lot and with the Avalon a 25 mm (one inch) increase in width has resulted in stylists creating a dramatically different exterior. With a wide grille, the

designers concentrated on aero efficiency that reduced the car's drag coefficient from an industry average 0.31 to a stunning 0.28.

The 3.0 litre quad cam V6 benefits from

Toyota's VTEC variable valve timing technology that raises power to 210 hp and 220 ft/lb of torque while reducing emission on the big sedan to qualify it as a Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) with Transport Canada.

Every piece of the car was studied to reduce noise, vibration and harshness (NVH). One of the solutions is a new Active Engine Mount (AEM). It takes the pulse of the engine vacuum and applies to a diaphragm in the ACM. This creates a vibration that is directly opposed to normal engine vibration (a big problem in transversely mounted power plants). The effect is the vacuum vibration cancels the other out.

The transmission for this front driver sedan is a four-speed automatic with engine control module that sifts through billions of inputs to deliver near seamless shifts.

In addition to the 25 mm increase in width the instrument panels was moved forward 100 mm. The back seat was raised 12 mm (one-half inch) while the front seats went up 25 mm as well. The impression is of traveling high, wide and handsome down the road with the higher seating and improved vision giving the same kind of being in control that minivan drivers feel.

It's interesting that the V6 engine produces the same power and torque as the much

See Luxury five seater, page 20

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