

Markham Economist & Sun / Stouffville Tribune Wheels Edition



MARKHAM KIA
 KIA It's about time everyone had a well made car.
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The arrival of any new Toyota is usually anticipated with the same degree of excitement as a solar eclipse.

However, when that car is a new Corolla, it's always cause for an even more tumultuous celebration.

Amazingly, the Corolla has been around for more than 35 years and has been the most popular car in Japan for 33 of those. More than 28 million have been chummed out from a variety of plants (14 at last count) and sold in 142 countries. This makes it the best-selling passenger car on the planet, easily surpassing such mass-produced notables as the VW Beetle and the Model T Ford.

Now, a new ninth-generation model has made its appearance, promising to add to Toyota's already impressive sales lustre.

To underscore the car's growing importance for Toyota on the North American stage, consider that 39 per cent of all Corolla sales occur on this continent. Five years ago, that number was 30 per cent. Consider, too, that it's the full-size Camry — and not the Corolla — that's Toyota's biggest seller here, a fact that makes those numbers even more impressive.

In designing the 2003 Corolla, Toyota took the longer, wider and taller route to create a more spacious cabin. But the new size tells only part of the story. The car's exterior sheet-metal now has some badly-needed pizzazz, something that has been lacking in Corollas for some time. As an added bonus, the Corolla's coefficient of drag has been reduced to 0.296, down from last year's 0.31.

Toyota claims to have recognized at long last that Corolla buyers tend to be older than the segment average. As a result, the company is determined to reach a more youthful audience that tends to stray into Honda or Mazda territory. From almost any

angle, the Corolla is reminiscent of the restyled 2002 Camry, which means it has risen several notches on the attractiveness scale.

On the inside, Corolla's designers used Toyota's upscale Lexus division as their benchmark. It's doubtful that anyone will ever really confuse the two, but the seat fabrics have been upgraded compared to the 2002 Corolla, and the materials used to finish the dashboard and door panels now have a richer and more inviting look.

Under the Corolla's newly-formed hood sits a 1.8-litre DOHC four-cylinder engine with variable valve timing that's similar to the previous-generation powerplant. However, a more efficient intake manifold has increased output to 130 horsepower, a gain of five over last year's car.

As before, you can choose your Corolla with a five-speed manual transmission, or go with an optional four-speed automatic.

Corolla for '03 is available in three distinct levels of trim: base CE, Sport, and luxury-like LE. The CE really shouldn't be considered a 'base' model at all since it arrives with features such as a four-speaker sound system with CD player, tilt steering, 60/40 split rear seat, outside temperature gauge and 15-inch wheels. The S adds air conditioning, aluminum alloy wheels, special body-side molding and front and rear spoilers, while the LE includes power windows, keyless remote entry, upgraded cloth interior and a height adjustment for the driver's seat. That still leaves an array of options to be considered, including ABS, sunroof, side-impact airbags and, for the first time on a Corolla, a leather-trimmed interior.

Like the Beetle and the Model T before it, the Corolla has succeeded because of Toyota's unflinching determination to produce a rock-solid automobile at an affordable price. You can't ask for much more than that in a small car, a sentiment echoed by 28 million Corolla owners the world over.



2003 Corolla



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