

Camry Hybrid: A family car winner

March 25 2015, by Ann M. Job

The roomy, fuel-sipping Toyota Camry Hybrid family sedan gets better for 2015 with more appealing exterior styling, upgraded interior, improved ride and handling and quieter passenger cabin.

Coming just three years after the launch of the current generation Camry Hybrid, the changes are more than expected for a mid-cycle refresh of a mid-size sedan. They better position the Camry Hybrid against stylish-looking competitors such as the 2015 Hyundai Sonata Hybrid and Ford Fusion Hybrid sedans.

Consumer Reports lists the Camry Hybrid as a recommended buy, noting that predicted reliability is better than average.

Best of all, the 2015 Camry Hybrid earned an overall five-out-of-five stars in federal government crash testing.

Among the standard safety features on every Camry Hybrid are 10 air bags, including knee air bags to keep driver and front passengers properly positioned in their seats during a frontal crash. There also are two outboard rear seat-mounted air bags that work with side curtain air bags to protect bodies and heads in side crashes.

Additionally, a rearview camera is standard equipment.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$27,615 for a base, 2015 Camry Hybrid LE with 200-horsepower hybrid powertrain that includes a 156-horsepower four

cylinder gasoline engine and a continuously variable transmission (CVT).

This is higher than the starting retail price, including destination charge, of \$26,825 for a 2015 Sonata Hybrid with a net horsepower of 199 and a six-speed automatic transmission. The Sonata Hybrid's four-cylinder engine generates 159 horses on its own.

The Camry Hybrid's starting retail price also is higher than the \$26,910 starting MSRP, including destination charge, for a 2015 Fusion Hybrid with combined 188 horsepower and fuel-conscious CVT. The Fusion Hybrid's gasoline engine is a 141-horsepower four cylinder.

The Camry Hybrid for 2015 benefits from the revamping that Toyota undertook for all Camry cars, including non-hybrids.

But Toyota's Hybrid Synergy Drive system is unchanged from the 2014 Camry Hybrid, which explains why fuel economy—already third best among gasoline-electric hybrid sedans sold in the United States—is the same as last year. The top 2015 Camry Hybrid federal government mileage ratings are 43 miles per gallon in city driving and 39 mpg on highways for the base LE that rides on 16-inch, low-rolling resistance tires.

The upper-level SE and XLE models, which have wider and larger 17-inch tires, are rated at 40/38 mpg.

Note that the Camry Hybrid can go more miles per gallon in city driving than on highways because the hybrid system is tuned to maximize city travel.

By comparison, the federal government rates the 2015 Sonata Hybrid at 36/40 mpg, and the 2015 Fusion Hybrid is rated at 44/41 mpg.

The test, 2015 Camry Hybrid SE showed the government's mileage estimates are not farfetched. In combined city and highway driving, the test car averaged 39.4 mpg without the driver actively striving to maximize every gallon of fuel.

With a 17-mile gas tank, this mileage translated into a commendable travel range of 670 miles, which is 41 percent greater than that provided by the base non-hybrid, four-cylinder Camry.

At today's prices, a fill-up of the Camry Hybrid's tank can cost just over \$41. This is notably low for a nearly 16-foot-long, five-seat car with generous passenger space that includes 38.9 inches of rear-seat legroom and a 13.1-cubic-foot trunk.

The 2015 Sonata Hybrid with nearly identical length has 34.6 inches of rear-seat legroom and a 12.1-cubic-foot trunk. Note, however, that the Sonata Hybrid's front-seat legroom is a commodious 45.5 inches. The Camry Hybrid's measures a good 41.6 inches.

Toyota has seemingly mastered the art of smooth transitions between electric power and gasoline engine power.

When the test car started forward from a standstill, the silent electric-supplied power provided quick torque—enough for a 0-to-60-mph sprint taking just 7.6 seconds, according to Toyota's measurements. As speed increased, engine power smoothly blended in and then took over. Yet, the tester, which weighed more than 3,500 pounds, felt sprightly and energetic, and not heavy or ponderous.

In the test Camry Hybrid, the transitions were typically seamless and power delivery was comfortable in all but the biggest uphill mountain road climbs, when the four cylinder seemed to strain.

Torque from the 2.5-liter, double overhead cam, Atkinson cycle four cylinder peaked at 156 foot-pounds at 4,500 rpm.

New sound insulation in the car did a good job of keeping out most road noises.

Combined with attractive, upgraded, soft-touch trim pieces inside and a pleasing, easy-to-understand new dashboard arrangement of controls, the changes make the new Camry Hybrid feel upscale.

Rack-and-pinion steering with electric power assist still had a light, mainstream feel in the tester. And the [car](#)'s wider stance, a stiffer body that came from more welds during assembly, and suspension improvements that included a new rear stabilizer bar all helped reduce body roll and provide more controlled, confident handling.

2015 Toyota Camry Hybrid SE

BASE PRICE: \$26,790 for LE; \$27,995 for SE.

PRICE AS TESTED: \$32,133.

TYPE: Front engine, front-wheel drive, five-passenger, gasoline-electric hybrid, mid-size sedan.

ENGINE: 2.5-liter, double overhead cam, Atkinson cycle four cylinder with VVT-i mated to a 105-kilowatt electric motor and 244.8-volt, nickel-metal hydride battery pack.

MILEAGE: 40 mpg (city), 38 mpg (highway).

TOP SPEED: 116 mph.

LENGTH: 190.9 inches.

WHEELBASE: 109.3 inches.

CURB WEIGHT: 3,565 pounds.

BUILT AT: Georgetown, Ky.

OPTIONS: Entune premium audio with navigation and app suite (includes 7-inch display screen, USB port with iPod connectivity, Bluetooth, AM/FM/CD player/MP3/WMA playback capability, six speakers, high-definition radio, SiriusXM satellite radio with three-month free trial) \$1,300; power moonroof \$915; remote start \$499; illuminated door sill enhancement \$299; carpet/trunk mat set \$225; wireless charging \$75.

DESTINATION CHARGE: \$825.

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