

A Toyota Prius - because it's that good or because it's tha green?

 By [Ané Theron](#) 5 Sep 2016

In some of the world's most progressive cities, the Toyota Prius is a common sight, with drivers of electric vehicle enjoying everyday advantages such as prime parking spots at supermarkets and exemption from fuel consumption tax, and in some cases also government subsidies.



In Austria, hybrid vehicles and other alternative fuel vehicles benefit from a fuel consumption tax that pays bonuses to passenger cars with low emissions. In South Africa, the plug-in hybrid vehicle market is barely in existence, thanks to a complete lack of infrastructure. Petrol-electric vehicles such as the Prius, Toyota Auris Hybrid and Honda Jazz Hybrid are exactly setting sales records either. But if the Prius is as economical as they say, should you consider one, instead of an efficient oil-burner?

Futuristic cabin

At AutoTrader I recently took week-long ownership of Toyota's fourth-generation Prius at Cape Town International Airport. I stepped inside the thoroughly futuristic and upmarket cabin, at first I was quite stumped as to how to drive it - the layout is completely different from anything else.



After I managed to switch it on and selected the right gear via the small, joystick-like gear knob on the centre panel, I found myself unable to move - the hand brake was nowhere to be found. Then I rang the fleet manager, because I was certainly not expecting it to be the old-fashioned pedal-type situated in the footwell. With a silent 'whoosh' I pulled out of the car-park in full Electric Vehicle mode, and started to enjoy my time in the comfortable and almost clinical, dual-toned cabin.

In the looks department, the new Prius is looking more sporty, and less hipster-like. In black, it looks quite aggressive and menacing, with angular design cues clearly taken from the Lexus range. It's lower, wider and supposedly more spacious than its predecessor, and it's the first Toyota to be built on the TNGA (Toyota New Global Architecture) platform.

But is it good-looking? I wouldn't say its sigh-inducing, but it's an improvement. The rear-end, however, leaves a lot to be desired. It's as if the bootlid is too high, making the flat behind appear very high and unbalanced. Yet, the new Prius is quite a head-turner, even if it's mostly out of people's curiosity.



Tweaked engine

Engine wise, it's still the same 1.8-litre unit doing duty in the previous Prius, but it has been tweaked considerably to keep fuel usage to a minimum. It co-works with two electric motor-generators that are lighter and smaller than before. The nickel metal Hydride battery is more compact and is located beneath the rear seats, and therefore doesn't impinge on boot space. And speaking of boot space, I managed to fit an entire elliptical/cross-trainer into the boot once I folded the rear seats completely flat. It turns out that high bootlid serves an important purpose - it gives you more space to put your stuff. And in a family car, that's precisely what you want.

But what's the bottom line? The Prius is quite lovely to drive - the complete output from the entire system offers 90 kW of power and because it's partly electric, the power is there at the moment when you need it. Thanks to improved Hybrid software, the Prius can draw more on its electric drivetrain, allowing it to accelerate in a low engine rev range. As for fuel efficiency: you can expect anything from a brilliant 3.9 to 6 litres per 100 km.

Driver scoring

Every time you stop, the Prius will also give you a score (it constantly evaluates how efficiently you're driving) and some helpful tips. I know that my acceleration needs work - my right foot tends to be a little heavy from the get-go. That made me lose quite a few points, but at least it drew my attention to that flaw, and I found myself constantly trying to improve my score (There's a reason why the Prius drivers in LA drive so slowly, they're always trying to better their marks!) And it's so quiet and serene driving in full electric mode, but you can only do so at low speeds.



As for ease of use, it doesn't take long to master using the mini-joystick gear lever. But tell the kids to keep their hands off the centre panel - my seven-year old nearly got me into a fair bit of trouble by easily selecting 'Reverse'. Had it not been for the Prius's irritating beeping (it does so when it's going backwards) I would not have realised, and probably would have hit the S-Class parked behind me.

The Prius's price tag of R427,200 is a bit steep, even if it is quite the practical family car. If you buy a Prius, you buy it because you think it's cool and you're a Prius person. There are a lot of cheaper diesels to choose from that offer decent fuel economy as well. I recently drove the standard feature-filled Renault Kadjar Dynamique 81kW 1.5dCi EDC (R414,900) which is not only economical (it has a range of around 1,150 km per tank, and uses 5-6 litres of diesel per 100 km), but drives like a hatch and allows you access into the great outdoors, and away from the ever-present technology.

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course. [View my profile and articles...](#)

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