

Blurred Lines: Toyota Venza Combines Sleek Car Design with SUV Versatility

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Done right, practicality can make a design statement. Submitted as evidence: the Toyota Venza, a sophisticated crossover that blends sport sedan and SUV attributes in a distinctive style that's neither sedan nor SUV. With the Venza, Toyota designers achieved midsize exterior packaging while providing cavernous interior room.

Toyota made refinements inside and beneath the Venza for 2015. Upgraded Entune® audio systems provide more features and convenience, and all models now have a standard backup camera. Power choices continue with a 2.7-liter 4-cylinder engine with 181 hp and a 268-horsepower 3.5-liter V6, though the model line has been streamlined. The Venza LE is now exclusively available with a 4-cylinder engine, still with the choice of front-wheel drive (FWD) and all-wheel drive (AWD). The XLE grade offers a four-cylinder or V6 with FWD or AWD, and the Limited is now available only with the V6 and AWD.

Also new for 2015, the Towing Prep Package is standard for models with the V6 engine. The package equips Venza with an engine oil cooler, larger radiator fan and heavy-duty alternator and allows a 3,500-lb. towing capacity. That's easily enough to pull a trailer carrying recreational watercraft, for example.

The Venza seats five in uncompromised comfort. With 39.1 inches of rear seat legroom, this unique vehicle rivals full-size sedans for passenger comfort. Venza customers benefit from a raised driving position, higher sightlines and ground clearance (8.1 inches) of an SUV. Venza's comfortable 15.3-inch step-in height makes getting in and out easy. Toyota designers concealed a surprising 70.2 cu. ft. of cargo space (with rear fold-flat seats lowered) in such a sleek design.

Driving performance and ride comfort skew to the sport sedan side of the spectrum, thanks to a refined four-wheel independent suspension and quiet ride. The Venza gets its powerful stance not only from the bold body design, but also the standard 19-inch alloy wheels on four-cylinder models and 20-inch wheels with the V6 versions.

Developed specifically for the North American market, the Venza was designed at Toyota's Caltex Design studios in Newport Beach, Calif. and Ann Arbor, Mich. The Venza is assembled at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky (TMMK), in Georgetown, Ky., and more than 70 percent of Venza's components come from North American suppliers.

Two Levels of Performance

The 2.7-liter 4-cylinder engine, standard for the Venza LE and XLE grades, smoothly delivers 181 horsepower at 5,800 rpm and 182 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,200 rpm. The 3.5-liter V6 provides a big step up in performance with 268 horsepower at 6,200 rpm and 246 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,700 rpm.

Both engines are partnered with a 6-speed sequential-shift electronically controlled automatic transmission with intelligence (ECT-i). That intelligence includes uphill/downhill shift logic that chooses the proper gear for driving conditions.

The Venza's available Active Torque Control All-Wheel Drive is an all-weather friend. The system optimizes torque distribution between the front and rear wheels to help ensure stable acceleration and smooth cornering on all road surfaces, providing excellent overall handling in inclement weather.

The 4-cylinder Venza is EPA-rated at 20 MPG city/26 MPG highway for both FWD and AWD models. The V6 model has EPA-estimated fuel economy ratings of 19 MPG city/26 MPG highway for FWD and 18/25 for AWD.

Handles and Rides Like a Sedan

You can't see the Venza's center of gravity, of course, but it's lower than in typical SUVs, and that's something you can feel in Venza's handling agility. Front suspension uses a rigid L-arm-type MacPherson strut with a stabilizer bar, and the rear suspension is a dual-link MacPherson strut setup with a stabilizer bar. Electric power steering, with its ideally weighted effort, helps make the Venza easy to maneuver in any situation. It has a more direct steering feel when driving yet delivers just the right amount of assist when parking.

Concept Car Design Brought to Life

The Venza inherited its aerodynamic shape, low roofline, crisp character lines and wheels-at-the-corners stance from a Toyota concept vehicle called the FT-SX. It was a bold move at the time to blur the lines between sedan, coupe and SUV, and now other brands seem to be following its example.

The Venza, though, preserved practicality with its head-turning looks. The 28-inch rear load-in height is almost as low as that of the Toyota Sienna minivan. And here's a clever detail: Because the closed doors cover the rocker panels, the driver and passengers are protected from accumulated road dust and grime while entering and exiting.

A large liftgate provides easy access to the 36.2 cu. ft. cargo area behind the rear seats, which is more than double the typical full-size sedan's trunk. That space nearly doubles with the 60/40 split, reclining, one-touch fold-flat rear seats lowered. A power liftgate with jam protection is standard on the XLE and Limited grades.

Venza's design uses light to good effect. The side-view mirrors integrate turn signals and puddle lamps. The standard daytime running lights not only increase visibility to others, but also give the vehicle a striking appearance, day or night. The Limited grade ups the ante with LED daytime running lights with an on/off feature as standard equipment.

Concept Car Design Inside, Too

The shapely coupe-like influence in the Venza's roofline doesn't mean coupe-like room. Quite the contrary, the cabin provides ample headroom, shoulder room, hip room and couple distance. Not only did the Venza get its good looks from a striking concept vehicle, but it brought the concept's distinctive cabin layout to life, as well. Venza's curvaceous dash puts the shift lever, audio system and automatic dual zone climate controls within especially easy reach.

The designers created a unique "60/60" console layout that gives both the driver and front passenger the feeling that 60 percent of the space is accessible from their seating position. All grades have a standard Optitron[®] speedometer and tachometer. All Venza grades also include a TFT multi-information instrument panel display.

Three available interior colors include Ivory, Light Gray, and Black. The LE offers each color in fabric, while the XLE and Limited do so in leather.

A Place for Everything

The Venza not only plays music from all kinds of digital devices, but it also provides room for them in several clever storage locations. The adjustable center console features a sliding cover and armrest, three iPod[®]/MP3 player holders with wire concealment features, and a large storage compartment. You'll also find a USB port, auxiliary audio jack and 12-volt power outlet in the center-console compartment.

Nobody will be thirsty in the Venza. The cabin offers 10 front and rear beverage holders (six bottle holders and four cup holders). These include dual-illuminated, sliding front cup-holders in the center console, two in the rear-seat armrest, and front- and rear-door bottle holders.

Tuned in with Entune Multimedia

Music and information get a boost in the 2015 Venza with upgraded Entune multimedia audio systems. The standard Entune Audio Plus in the LE includes:

- A 6.1-inch touch screen
- AM/FM CD player with MP3/WMA playback capability
- Six speakers
- USB port with iPod® connectivity and control
- Advanced voice recognition
- Bluetooth® hands-free phone capability, phone book access and music streaming
- An auxiliary audio jack.

New Entune features for 2015 include iTunes® Tagging, HD radio, HD predictive traffic and Doppler weather overlay, AM/FM cache radio, SiriusXM All Access Radio with 3-month complimentary trial, and Gracenotes album cover art. With cache radio, you can pause live radio; the system will store up to 20 minutes for you to play back later.

The XLE steps up to Entune Premium Audio with Navigation and App Suite. Using your smartphone, you can access the subscription-free Entune apps including Bing™, OpenTable®, and MovieTickets.com, along with accessing useful travel-related services, such as live weather, traffic, fuel information (location and price), stocks, and sports. Toyota's Entune App Suite offers a large selection of music sources, including Pandora® and iHeartRadio.

Entune Premium JBL® Audio with Navigation and App Suite is standard on the Limited and optional on the XLE. True music aficionados will enjoy its 13 JBL® Synthesis speakers, which includes a subwoofer.

Toyota Value in Three Grades

The mono-spec Venza LE hardly seems like a “base” model with the following value-adding standard features:

- Dual-zone automatic climate control with air filter and second row seat vents
- Eight-way power driver's seat with power lumbar
- Multi-information display screen
- Tilt/telescopic steering wheel with audio controls
- 3.5-inch LCD multi-information display
- Adjustable rear-seat reading lights
- Three 12-volt power outlets.

The Venza XLE brings major doses of convenience and luxury to this versatile machine, adding:

- Leather-trimmed seating surfacessteering wheel and shift knob
- A 4-way power passenger seat
- Multi-stage heated front seats
- Driver seat memory
- Power-folding reverse tilt-down side mirrors
- Anti-theft system with alarm and engine immobilizer

- Smart Key system with push button start and illuminated entry.

The XLE's TFT multi-information display can be customized to adjust the font size and content, and navigation voice instructions are available in Spanish, French or English. (XM Traffic is available only in English).

Aside from powertrain choices, the XLE offers one major option, the Premium Package, which equips the vehicle with a panoramic glass roof with front power moonroof and Entune Premium JBL Audio with Navigation and App Suite.

The V6/AWD-only Venza Limited is fully equipped, combining all of the XLE standard and optional features with rear parking sonar, high-intensity discharge (HID) headlights with automatic high beams and LED daytime running lights. The auto high beam feature detects oncoming vehicles and automatically switches the headlights from high- to low-beam. There are no factory options for this top model.

Safety Star

Standard on Venza and all Toyota models, the STAR Safety System features enhanced Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRAC), Anti-lock Brake System (ABS) Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist and the Smart Stop Technology (SST).

Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), also standard on all Venza models, helps prevent the vehicle from rolling backward when starting out on a hill.

Venza provides seven airbags, including a driver's knee airbag, driver and front-passenger front-seat-mounted side airbags, and front and rear side-curtain airbags. The front seats feature active headrests. In certain types of rear-end collisions, a cable-actuated mechanism will move the headrest upward and forward to help limit movement of the occupant's head.

Limited Warranty

Toyota's 36-month/36,000 mile basic new-vehicle warranty applies to all components other than normal wear and maintenance items. Additional 60-month warranties cover powertrain for 60,000 miles and corrosion with no mileage limitation. Toyota dealers have complete details on the limited warranty.

The Venza also comes standard with Toyota Care, a complimentary plan covering normal factory-scheduled maintenance and 24-hour roadside assistance for two years or 25,000 miles, whichever comes first.

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