

2012 Toyota Highlander Offers Choice of Four-Cylinder, V6 and Hybrid Models

September 15, 2011

Fresh off vehicle revisions for 2011, the popular Toyota Highlander and Highlander Hybrid models move into 2012 and continue to offer the exceptional value cited by numerous third-party sources. Produced at Toyota's manufacturing plant in Princeton, Indiana, the Highlander is a three-row crossover that offers a choice between four-cylinder and V6 power, front-wheel drive (FWD) and full-time four-wheel drive (4WD). The Highlander Hybrid provides an exceptional blend of performance and fuel economy, with class-leading 28/28-MPG EPA city/highway fuel economy ratings.

The first-generation Highlander pioneered the midsize crossover utility vehicle segment, ushering in car-like performance, comfort and fuel efficiency with SUV-like roominess and versatility. The current, second-generation Highlander amplifies those attributes and is among the leaders in the segment in standard active and passive safety features. All models feature a standard 50/50 split third-row seat and rear climate control for customer comfort and flexibility.

The 2012 Highlander is available in Highlander, SE and Limited grades with either front-wheel drive (FWD) or full-time four-wheel-drive (4WD). A 270-horsepower 3.5-liter V6 is standard on the Limited grade and available for the others. All Highlander Hybrid models are equipped with four-wheel-drive with intelligence and are available in Highlander and Limited grades.

Performance and Efficiency

The Toyota Highlander offers three distinct levels of performance: The 2.7-liter four-cylinder engine produces 187 horsepower at 5,800 RPM and 186 lb.-ft. of peak torque at 4,100 RPM and offers an EPA-estimated 25 MPG rating in highway driving. The engine is equipped with a variable intake manifold and dual variable valve timing with intelligence (VVT-i), which controls phasing on both the intake and exhaust camshafts to optimize torque and fuel efficiency. The 2.7-liter engine is teamed exclusively with a six-speed electronically controlled automatic transmission.

The available 3.5-liter V6 (standard on Limited) produces 270 horsepower at 6,200 RPM and 248 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,700 RPM. The V6 is also equipped with dual VVT-i and a variable intake manifold. A five-speed, electronically controlled automatic transmission (ECT) offers selectable manual sequential shifting.

The Highlander Hybrid model's Hybrid Synergy Drive gained a new, more powerful 3.5-liter V6 in the previous model year, replacing a 3.3-liter V6. The system pairs the gasoline V6 engine with a high-torque electric drive motor-generator for total system output of 280 net horsepower. A second rear-mounted motor provides automatic on-demand four-wheel drive traction.

The 4WD Highlander Hybrid uniquely generates rear-wheel power with a separate electric motor that provides additional drive torque on demand. Thus, the Highlander Hybrid 4WD-i system does not require power-transfer gearing or a driveshaft from the front. The system electronically varies front and rear torque distribution depending on traction conditions.

Activating an EV mode switch located on the front center console allows the driver to operate strictly in electric-mode under certain conditions for a limited distance at low speeds, or in some stop-and-go driving conditions. A new ECON drive mode switch activates a throttle control program that adjusts the throttle response during

acceleration, enhancing fuel economy. The Hybrid System Indicator in the instrument gauge panel provides the driver with a guideline to help optimize fuel consumption.

Handling and Ride

The Highlander continues to build on its strength of delivering one of the most capable, smooth and quiet rides in the segment. Four-wheel independent suspension is via MacPherson struts in front and a dual-link strut rear suspension system. Base and SE Highlander models are equipped with standard 17-inch alloy wheels with 245/65 R17 tires; the Limited features standard 19-inch alloy wheels with 245/55 R19 tires. A direct tire pressure monitoring system is designed to alert the driver if pressure in a tire drops to critical levels. All Highlander models are equipped with four-wheel disc brakes. On conventional Highlander models, full-time four-wheel drive is available on all V6 grades.

Active Safety

Highlander comes standard with Toyota's Star Safety System™, which integrates operation of enhanced Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRAC), Electric Power Steering (EPS) and the anti-lock brake system (ABS) with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist (BA).

Enhanced VSC helps the driver maintain control by automatically adjusting engine output and braking force at each wheel under certain conditions, while also providing steering assistance in the appropriate direction through EPS. Gasoline Highlander models are also equipped with a straight-line steering feature. When varying traction causes ABS to apply different left/right braking force, the system can apply steering torque to help offset left/right pull.

The Highlander Hybrid employs the advanced Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management (VDIM) system. VDIM is designed to enhance handling, traction and braking systems that normally react to vehicle driving conditions by anticipating tire slippage before a skid, slide, or wheel spin occurs and helps to make corrections in a smooth, progressive way. In addition to integrating all of the Highlander's dynamic control systems (VSC, TRAC, BA, EPS, EBD and ABS), the VDIM system also employs powerful proprietary software to integrate the Electronic Throttle Control with intelligence (ETC-i) and Electronically Controlled Brakes (ECB).

All Highlander models incorporate a corner-braking feature. Harnessing the integration of the vehicle's dynamic control systems, this feature limits brake pressure on inside wheels during cornering to help enhance control through the turn. Standard on all models, Hill-Start Assist Control (HAC) helps prevent the vehicle from rolling backward from a stop by applying braking pressure for approximately two seconds.

Downhill Assist Control (DAC) is standard equipment on all Highlander gasoline 4WD models. The DAC feature is designed to maintain a constant speed and maintain handling and steering control by reducing wheel lock under braking even at slow speeds on slippery descents.

Occupant Safety

Highlander comes with seven standard airbags. These include advanced driver and front passenger airbags, front seat-mounted side airbags and a driver's knee airbag. Roll-sensing side curtain airbags help to protect the occupants of all three rows in the event of certain side collisions or the unlikely event of a vehicle rollover. Additionally, all Highlander models are equipped with front seat active headrests.

Comfort and Convenience

Standard features on all Highlander models include front and rear air conditioning; eight-way adjustable driver's seat (10-way on Limited); power door locks and windows with driver's window jam protection and auto-up/down feature; manual tilt and telescopic steering wheel; cruise control; multi-function keyless entry system; UV-reduction windshield and rear privacy glass; digital clock; dual sun visors with vanity mirrors and sliding

extensions; conversation mirror; illuminated entry system; scheduled maintenance indicator light; full-size spare tire and more.

The Highlander SE and Limited grades feature a standard backup camera with a 3.5-inch multi-information display; this feature is available for Highlander grade models as part of the optional Tech Package. The display includes a backup camera monitor, clock, outside temperature, warning messages, and cruise information that includes average fuel economy, average speed, distance to empty, current fuel economy, and trip timer. On models equipped with the optional navigation system, the backup camera's images are viewed on the seven-inch navigation screen.

The Tech Audio system is standard for SE and Limited and optional for Highlander grade; it features a USB port, integrated XM Satellite Radio (includes 90-day trial subscription) hands-free phone capability and music streaming via Bluetooth® wireless technology, helping ensure a wide array of "connected" capabilities for occupants. In the Base grade, this is part of a more comprehensive package that also includes a backup monitor with 3.5-inch multi-information display, an eight-way power driver seat, tonneau cover, engine immobilizer, easy-clean fabric interior, flip-up liftgate window, fog lamps and black roof rails.

The Highlander Hybrid Base grade gains standard easy-clean fabric seating, along with an eight-way power driver's seat, the Tech Audio, the third-row seat and manual rear climate control. The Highlander Hybrid base grade offers a Leather Package that includes leather-trimmed seats with front seat heaters, leather-trimmed steering wheel and shift knob, power moonroof, HomeLink®, auto-dimming rearview mirror with compass, plus an engine immobilizer with security alarm. The Highlander Hybrid Limited features standard automatic climate control for the rear and offers perforated leather seating surfaces.

Options

A variety of available options and accessories include a voice-activated touch screen navigation system with an eight-inch screen; JBL audio systems; leather-trimmed seats with front seat heaters, and a power tilt/slide moonroof. The optional tow package for V6 models enables up to 5,000-pound maximum towing capacity, while the four-cylinder tow package enables up to 3,500 pounds of maximum towing capacity. A power liftgate that can be opened and closed with a key fob or driver side control is an available option on the Highlander grade and standard on SE and Limited.

Exterior Design

Designed at Caltex Design Research in Newport Beach, Calif., the second-generation Highlander conveys a contemporary, dynamic presence via clean, sculpted lines, a wide, stable stance and muscular contours. The Highlander grade could be mistaken for an upgrade model with its six-spoke 17-inch alloy wheels, color-keyed power remote outside mirrors, and silver-painted front grille. The Limited looks the luxury part with chrome door handles and roof rails, puddle lamps and rear spoiler. The Limited grade also features stylish 19-inch alloy wheels and chrome roof rails.

The 2012 Highlander Hybrid is distinguished from the gasoline model by its own unique grille and bumper design, color-keyed rockers with chrome accents, plus vertically stacked fog lamps. The projector beam headlights and taillights feature blue lens covers.

Interior Design

The Highlander provides an open, airy and versatile interior with seating for seven or up to 95.4 cubic feet of total cargo capacity (94.1 for Highlander Hybrid). There are numerous storage compartments throughout the cabin, along with 10 cup holders, four bottle holders, two front and one cargo-area 12-volt auxiliary power outlets and cargo area tie-down hooks.

The Highlander and SE grades feature a center console, shift knob with silver-painted accents and front driver and passenger assist grips. The center console, shift knob and assist grip on the Limited grade feature wood-grain-style trim. Styling features on the inside of the Highlander Hybrid include silver and wood grain-style interior trim with chrome door handle accents, Optitron meters with blue graphics and a power meter with a hybrid system indicator.

The headrests are adjustable in two ways on the Highlander grade and four ways on SE and Limited. The second row provides 40/20/40 split seatbacks. The seat functions as either a three-person bench, or by removing the Center Stow™ seat, a pair of captain's chairs complete with armrests. This creates a convenient walk-through area between the seats for easier access to the third row. A second-row Center Stow center console can also be placed between the seats to provide additional storage and added convenience for child seats. The second row also slides fore and aft and reclines.

The third-row provides 50/50 seats with fold down headrests and fold-flat-into-floor capability for passenger comfort and storage flexibility. Access to the third-row is made easier by placing the walk-in lever at an easy-to-reach position at the bottom of the passenger-side second-row seat. Standard one-touch levers, on SE and Limited gas models and all Hybrid models, inside the cargo area allow the second-row seats to fold forward and flat. The third-row seats function in a similar manner, using a lever in the back of the seat.

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 the powertrain for 60,000 miles and corrosion with no mileage limitation. The hybrid-related components, including the HV battery, battery control module, hybrid control module and inverter with converter, are covered for eight years/100,000 miles.

The Highlander will also come 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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