

High and mighty Sequoia

By Joe Sage

Some people seem to think

Toyota makes nothing but the Prius and

GM makes nothing but the Escalade ESV.

That's not the case, and as proof,

we enter into evidence this

elegant beast, the Toyota Sequoia.



You know those vehicles you see with a cartoon family on the back window (just for fun, or possibly to justify to the world the bulk they've opted to drive). In a world where some large vehicles brag about seating for seven, the Toyota Sequoia offers eight: sufficient for decals representing mom, dad, six kids, and still the dog and cat. And it offers all this with the quality, fit and finish you appreciate from Toyota.

The Sequoia is the SUV sibling of the Toyota Tundra pickup, which we've driven in iterations from a short-cab, short-bed 2-wheel-drive performance model, up to an extended cab, full-bed 4x4. And we've come away thoroughly convinced that Toyota has found their foothold in the highly competitive realm of full-size pickups. The Toyota Sequoia represents the same triumph. Its size brings the word "beast" to mind, but in an admiring way. The Sequoia does have bulk, and it certainly contains a full volume of space, but it has a subtle streamlined look, almost like a Raymond Loewy luxury liner.

MODELS AND POWERTRAINS

The Sequoia is available in SR5, Limited and Platinum grades. Sequoia is available with a choice of two V8 engines: a 4.6-liter (introduced for 2010) and the original 5.7-liter unit. Both run on regular fuel. You can have rear-wheel drive or multi-mode 4-wheel drive with any.

The 310-hp 4.6L (standard on the SR5) has aluminum alloy cylinder heads with dual independent Variable Valve Timing with intelligence (VVT-i) and generates 327 lb-ft of torque. The 381-hp 5.7L iForce DOHC (the only engine on Limited and Platinum, and optional for SR5) pumps out 401 lb-ft of torque, also with VVT-i. The Sequoia features standard E85 Flex Fuel capability on 5.7-liter 4x4 models in our area.

The 5.7L V8 tows up to 7400 lbs. and produces 90 percent of its peak torque at just 2200 RPM, a big towing advantage. An Acoustic Control Induction System (ACIS) has two stages to optimize torque across the power curve, a Tow/Haul mode modifies shift points for optimal performance, and the hitch is integrated into the frame as a single unit.

An electronically controlled six-speed automatic transmission optimizes both performance and fuel economy.

PRICING AND OPTIONS

Our test vehicle, a 2010 model, came in Limited trim with the iForce 5.7-liter V8 and 4-wheel drive. Sticker was \$55,255, with a base of \$52,365 and options including a navigation-audio package (\$1460), skid plate (\$425), door sill protectors (\$55) and destination charge (\$950). Base for the same vehicle for 2011 is \$53,890.

The 2011 Sequoia has minor interior trim changes, a trailer hitch connector the same as the Tundra, and a new off switch for the standard Daytime Running Lights.

Base prices for 2011 range from \$40,555 for a rear-wheel-drive SR5 with the 4.6L V8, to \$60,930 for a 4-wheel-drive Platinum model with the 5.7L V8 (plus \$975 destination). The vehicle is very well equipped in base



form. Options include DVD-based navigation and a couple of rear-seat DVD entertainment systems, one at \$1670 or a voice-activated version at \$3130. There is also a healthy list of interior, exterior and performance accessories.

ROAD TIME AND DIRT TIME

We had good drive time on metro Phoenix surface streets and freeways and were very impressed with the Sequoia's ride and handling, particularly its tight turning circle and ease of parking (see sidebar).

The Sequoia features four-wheel independent suspension for ride quality, handling and straight-line control, with upper and lower A-arms at each wheel, shock absorbers, coil springs and a tubular anti-roll bar.

To give the vehicle more of a challenge, we drove out Seven Springs Road. On the paved portion—which gets quite narrow and winding, and is penned in by tight guardrails—as large as this vehicle is, it felt quite easy to control, a very manageable size and form.

The 2011 Sequoia is equipped with Toyota's STAR Safety System™, including Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), an Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist (BA), plus Traction Control (TRAC). On 4WD models, TRAC is replaced by A-TRAC (Active-Traction Control). We gave the Sequoia a minor 4WD test in a large gravel area along the edge of one road. There's a center differential lock, but we didn't need that, nor the 4LO setting, for anything we were doing. But the regular dash switch between 2HI and 4HI couldn't be simpler. We gave it a little gas in 2WD, a little gas in 4WD, to see the difference, ran through some deep rutted areas while getting back on the road surface, and all was just fine. There were no really wild differences between 2WD and 4WD, given where we were, and most owners may never even push it this far, but it's great to know it's that capable.

The Toyota Sequoia gives an impression of being big, tall and heavy, but it's not quite as tall as it seems—it's a little low for access/egress if you're tall. And it's so well-balanced, you won't find it bulky or heavy.

The Sequoia is not a race car, nor is it intended to be, but driven as intended, it performs admirably in daily duty around town, and you can expand its limits considerably: take it on a small road, a challenging road, a dirt road, off-road, and you have quite a machine. ■



TOYOTA SEQUOIA LOGBOOK

- It was plenty hot when we first got in. On the plus side, a/c was on *and* recirc was on (unlike many vehicles that require recirc to be constantly reset). Oddly, you set a temperature, but the fan has a separate control.
- As with the Tundra pickup, we loved the gargantuan center console storage.
- First impressions of handling were as expected: feels big, a power cruiser, lots of power steering, lots of power brakes. It delivers what buyers would expect and want.
- We wish it came standard with integrated blind spot bubbles on the side mirrors.
- The brakes did seem soft at our first stop. Sequoia uses 13.9-inch ventilated disc brakes up front and 13.6-inch ventilated disc brakes at the rear.
- Our first pass over speed bumps was very noticeable, but our next move was pulling into a head-in parking space, and it performs the impossible as you pull in, targeting itself neatly into just one space.
- Power and shift range seem good, anecdotally, on our first long stretch of surface street. Best of all, we're happy to have it feel like 35 when the speed is posted 35, not running at 55 without knowing it, easy to do in a vehicle this size. However, we next notice ourselves cruising toward 55 in a 45 and pay better attention.
- The radio seems to have six presets for AM, six for FM but none for satellite none, so you have to search from that long list every time; the manual seems to confirm this. Audio controls on the wheel turn with the wheel (common enough), limiting effectiveness. We try to tune up/down and find jump 40-50 stations at a time. We reach over to tune by the knob, and it reverts to the nav screen. From there, you would have to take your eyes several feet off the wheel to see whether to hit audio or sat, or either, then reach for the farther knob and start turning. It has tactile detents, but not one detent per number, nor two, more sort of one-ish. Distracting.
- Audio quality is average, despite a full set of features/interface. Besides bass-treble-fader, etc., there is DSP, surround on/off and automatic sound levelizer. We tried automatic features both on and off, but it didn't make any difference.
- We found it hard to be certain how much of the rear liftgate is power-activated and how much can (or can't) just be manually lifted. There's a hold-and-punch on the key, or if the vehicle's unlocked it seems you can just grab it, but it fights you on the way up and on the way down. As with most such features, a few days of actual ownership and use should reveal all mysteries.
- We love tight turning circles. The Sequoia easily does a U-turn in the available space of a 4-lane road separated by only the slimmest of dividers. Sure enough, specifications show that the Sequoia has a turning circle of 39 feet, noted as one of the tightest in its class. —JS