

GETTING AROUND IN TEXAS

2018 TOYOTA AVALON TOURING

We got to Texas just as the future did, too. Our Denton-addressed hotel was so new (we were among the very first guests) that it was not in the nav system. In fact, the whole area is so new, we were not on any roads at all, on screen, for that flying car feeling. (Nobody else's nav showed it, either.)

The future also got ahead of itself with our wheels. We had a nice new 2018 Toyota Avalon to drive from DFW to our hotel and to the track outside Decatur. But within a week, Toyota introduced an all-new 2019 Avalon.

Longer, lower and wider, with shorter overhangs and its cabin extended by seven inches, the gen-five 2019 Avalon features more power and improved fuel economy from new V6 and hybrid powertrains, new multi-link rear and available adaptive variable suspensions, standard Entune 3.0 and connectivity via wifi, Toyota Remote, smartwatch, Amazon Alexa and Apple CarPlay.

While the 2018 Avalon—a near-Lexus experience at Toyota prices—suited our purposes very nicely, the main thing we got out of our drive time may have been perspective. The all-new 2019 Avalon (starting at \$35,500), noticeably restyled and updated in every way, would, in fact, turn out to be one of the vehicles we drove at the Texas Auto Roundup, where it won its category, Full-Size Car. Already a great car, the award for the 2019 is enough to tell you it is only getting better. ■

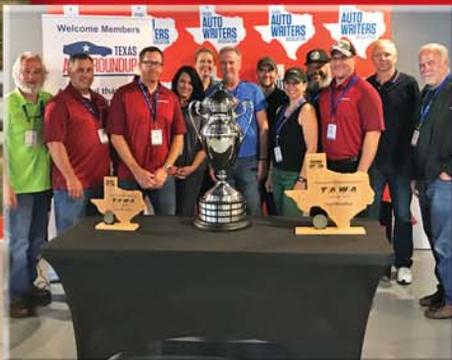


There is no predetermined vehicle driving sequence, so each driver grabs whatever he or she can, in whatever order (subject to ongoing availability of some of the hottest rides). Scoring is entered online during midday break and at the end of the day, with efficient and accurate electronic tabulation (some other events are still done by hand.)

There's a certain amount of glory in running at the big tracks—Texas Motor Speedway and COTA—but Eagles Canyon Raceway was perfect for the event, with handy staging adjacent to the course and just the right length to get everything done.

Categories are determined by the event group, and entries are chosen and placed in categories by the manufacturers, with a certain amount of flex by both parties at times. Among eleven vehicle categories, six had just two vehicles each. The most crowded segment was Activity Vehicle, with eight contenders. Any number of vehicles could have been in different classes, and some were in more than one. Ultimately, each manufacturer wants us to experience and evaluate each vehicle in its own best and most appropriate light.

KEEP RIGHT >>



Eagles Canyon Raceway instructors offered right-seat orientation runs in the club's midengine Porsche Cayman coupes (left). Sponsors included the Steel Market Development Institute (SMDI), Polaris Slingshot (who despite not competing gave us each all the track time we wanted, center right), and Dallas communication firm Wieck. For dinner, we headed to restaurants, coffee and ice cream surrounding the downtown Denton County Courthouse-on-the-Square (at right)—the original hometown center of this rapidly growing college town (home to University of North Texas, Texas Woman's University and others).