

# Simple mastery

HIGHLY USER-FRIENDLY HATCH BY JOE SAGE

Many people traditionally think of a compact sedan as an econocar, while many think of a hatchback as a sportier entry. The 2024 Toyota Corolla Hatchback brings the best of both worlds. Or more. The gasoline version is rated 41 MPG highway, while its 169 horses are plenty for a weight of just over 3,000 pounds. (Hybrid models, the performance GR Corolla, and two powertrains of the related Corolla Cross vary the formula a bit.) Adding to our Corolla's sportiness and general appeal is its Nightshade Edition build.

For a special opportunity in a special edition, Nightshade is based on the next-to-base-model SE. It's available as a front-drive sedan or hatchback and as a hybrid sedan, either front- or all-wheel-drive. Since the hatchback is priced lower than the sedan—a win-win for sportier buyers—our hand-

some sample is one of the least expensive Corolla versions you can buy (see chart at lower right).

Pre-arrival photos in Midnight Black Metallic seemed to nail the Nightshade aura. But it also comes in silver or Wind Chill Pearl, both of those also with a black metallic roof. Our sample is the white one—less Batman, more Storm Trooper. The Nightshade is carried through with that roof, as well as black badging, grille surround, rear fascia and other details. The interior on any color is black fabric, while the wheels are bronze alloy—18-inches, adding to its stance and presence.

Features are extensive, especially for the price—filtered automatic climate, projected path back-up camera, more intuitive than average full instrumentation and controls, power locks, drive modes, overhead console, full connectivity and much

more. A wide range of additional features via options and packages are also reasonably priced.

We routinely do initial seat and mirror adjustments first thing. The mirrors were user friendly and quick—far more rare than you might think. The seats are manual (and do include lumbar). For us, that was moot, as we realized they were already perfectly comfortable as delivered, which is unheard of—so much so, we never even thought about them again all week. Some people, in fact, will be absolutely delighted to find such things as weight-saving manual seats, now quite rare.

The Nightshade name may sound deep and sinister. But it put a smile on our face right away. While it's obviously affordable, this Corolla is a surprisingly potent little unit that can make anybody quite happy. Power from Corolla's two-liter is well suited to the task and the transmission well suited to the power.

We flipped it into sport mode to accelerate up a freeway ramp, which was sort of like lighting a

bigger fire under a smaller firecracker. This was fine, as we're happy when we like it right out of the box and don't even feel compelled to use modes. We suspect the same with eco mode, which may bump MPG up a little, also already top notch.

It is nice, though, that it has paddle shifters, which were very effective for typical use in town. An interesting flip side to lower horsepower is that you may be cruising along in a nice position on the freeway, but perhaps get bottled up. If forced to slow, brake lights could just confuse others, but paddle downshifts are very effective. Unlike many systems, this will revert back to D pretty quickly, which we don't always prefer, but it was perfect for these around-town scenarios. Something you used to find only on advanced sports cars, it's all well implemented on this little \$24,000 car.

Even hard into a turn at speed, there is no real trace of front-drive torque, another engineering marvel. Steering also got high marks through an unexpected stretch of freeway construction cones and temporary lanes at speed. Very precise.

We even mostly made friends with its CVT, seldom an active driver's preferred choice. Our early

info hadn't identified the transmission, and we had simply noted its generally great performance. We didn't learn it was a CVT until after we'd driven it a few days, after which we did notice a few typical traits—a prompted response? Be that as it may, when you have to give it some gas, it mimics a power downshift with the best of any automatic. All in all, this is a well-done CVT.

We remain impressed with Toyota's devotion to *kaizen*, the Japanese philosophy of "continuous improvement." Some have clamored for the company to throw out everything they know and just build EVs. Toyota has added these, but they have continued to fine-tune established drivetrains, steering and handling, and their benchmark hybrid systems and fuel economy overall to perfection.

Mastery may make you think of the high end. But much as the test of an audio system is not just blasting it loud, instead listening to its accuracy at quieter levels, the test of a vehicle lineup may be not just at the \$200k end, but at the \$20k end.

The Nightshade hatch shows Toyota's mastery of high value at a reasonable price, where Corolla is a well known contender, for clear reasons. ■



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Toyota, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE	2.0L 4-cyl DOHC 16v D-4S dual inj w Dual VVT-i
HP/TORQUE	169 hp / 151 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	13.0:1
TRANSMISSION	Dynamic Shift CVT
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
SUSPENSION	F: independent MacPherson strut w 25.4 stblzr bar; R: multi-link w 26.5 stblzr bar & springs
STEERING	elec pwr asst rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 11.1 vented; R: 10.4 solid
WHEELS	18-in bronze-finished alloys
TIRES	225/40R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	172.0 / 103.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.4 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.4 / 37.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.0 / 29.9 in
WEIGHT	3150 lb
CARGO CAPACITY	17.8 cu.ft
FUEL / CAPACITY	87 regular / 13.2 gal
MPG	32/41/35 (city/hwy/comb)
<b>BASE PRICE</b>	<b>\$24,355</b>
SPECIAL COLOR: Windchill Pearl	425
BLACK ROOF	500
SE OPTION PKG: blind spot monitor w rear cross traffic alert, wireless charger	605
CARPET MAT PKG: black, silver logo	289
REAR BUMPER PROTECTOR	89
FRAMELESS HOMELINK MIRROR	175
DOOR SILL PROTECTORS	179
DESTINATION CHARGE	1095
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$27,712</b>
<i>(Price has increased a little; see chart at right.)</i>	

## 2024 COROLLA LINEUP

### GASOLINE SEDANS/HATCHBACKS:

169-hp 2.0L 4-cylinder - FWD		
LE	Sedan	\$22,050
SE	Hatchback	23,505
	Sedan	24,490
Nightshade	Hatchback	24,505
	Sedan	25,490
XSE	Hatchback	26,805
	Sedan	27,150

### COROLLA HYBRID SEDANS:

138-hp 1.8L +133.2 hp elec - AWD	
LE, SE, Nightshade, XLE	\$23,500-27,250

### GR COROLLA HATCH:

300-hp 1.6L 3-cylinder turbo - AWD	
Core, Premium, Circuit	\$36,500-45,140

### COROLLA CROSS:

169-hp 2.0L 4-cylinder - FWD, AWD	
L, LE (FWD), XLE (AWD)	\$23,860-29,385

### COROLLA CROSS HYBRID:

150-hp 2.0L 4-cyl / 196 hp comb - AWD	
S, SE, Nightshade, XSE	\$28,220-31,405

*(Note: their combined power specifications for hybrid versions are given inconsistently between models; we've doublechecked, but if you're shopping, you'll want to triple-check. But this info gives at minimum a relative idea.)*