

Natural evolution

BY JOE SAGE

We have driven the all-new Toyota Crown twice before—once briefly at a multi-vehicle mini-launch event in May 2023 (see social media posts), and we had one in our fleet for a week eight months prior to this one (see November-December 2023, four issues ago).

When this one was proposed for our schedule, we first thought, we just had one recently. No, this is the MAX, we were told. Much more powerful. There's always a pitch on a repeat, but we compared specs and agreed. And we're glad we did.

Toyota Crown is a nameplate just returned to our shores, but in its 15th generation over 70 years globally (generally a premium full-size sedan).

Notable is the new Crown's crossover-evocative "lift-up style" (sitting a few inches higher than the typical sedan, with a notably high beltline and

visually high rocker panel, great for entry-egress, especially for anyone used to SUVs or pickups. All the new ones are hybrids. Inside is a new NiMH battery system—more efficient, aimed toward providing lithium performance without lithium—with a choice of 236-hp Hybrid (41 mpg) or 340-hp Hybrid MAX (30 mpg) powertrains. The first comes with a CVT, the latter a six-speed automatic.

We had taken the 236-horse Crown for a solid spin south of the airport at that brief launch, a good chance to test its 5.7-second zero-to-60, cornering and handling, and general performance— together reminding us of acceleration, speed and stability in the first all-wheel-drive German performance cars, while its stance and stature evoke the classic AMC Eagle sedan, all combined with modern high fuel mileage. While the faster MAX was shown at that event, we had not driven it.

As noted in our November-December drive, categorized however you wish, Crown is a knockout. Inside, it's spacious, and outside it signals strength and power, and is handsome from all around.

At that time, we had said, "We often drive one version of a vehicle, with a mention of its alternate versions sufficing. In the case of Toyota Crown, we are curious to give the turbo-plus-automatic MAX an extended drive. The two are a strong pairing, both very compelling." And here we are.

Hybrid MAX is at least currently redundant to Platinum—the only MAX is top trim Platinum and the only Platinum has the turbo MAX, one and the same. (We speculate that this may evolve to include other combinations as sales establish themselves to support it, which they surely will.)

Basic build specifications are very similar between the two powertrains—the same brakes, same suspension—while Platinum shares many upgrades with Limited, such as eleven-speaker audio instead of six. Platinum adds much more, too—21-inch wheels (rather than 19), quad-LED headlights, heated mirrors, rain-sensing wipers, a panoramic glass roof with power sunshade—and is the only trim offering a Bi-Tone paint scheme. Prices overall are not all that far apart, if you can

swing the higher or highest versions.

The Crown Hybrid MAX engine and battery system deliver a great drive. We used it for the gamut of in-town duty—freeways, multi-lane surface streets, in and out of parking lots—and noted it as smooth, quick and accurate, with an epiphany. Toyota continues to impress us, as long-time masters of alternative powertrains, by not throwing out the kitchen sink over EV mania. It strikes us that anyone curious about EVs, but not really on board, needs to drive this gasoline vehicle. Torque is similarly immediate. Acceleration is not as blisteringly quick by the numbers, but at the same time many people may find that's a bit much on an EV. In any mode, from Eco up to Sport-plus, it commanded competitive freeway onramps like a banshee.

And while an EV runs silently, the Crown has its own authentic satisfying growl.

Best of all, you can just pull up to the gas pump and be on your way again in a few minutes.

Think of it as a highly-skilled natural evolution, rather than the forced evolution of a full EV.

While our logbooks are consistently full of feature nitpicks, that was not the case here. All our notes were about its great driving experience.



The MAX version's power is clearly impressive—you can tell that by the numbers—and the rest of its build is well suited to carry it and deliver it.

The 2025 models are also on the cusp of rolling out, for another point of comparison and potential bargain opportunity with the already hot 2024.

If you miss the large sedan category, abandoned now by nearly all, this may be just what you're looking for, particularly if not on a luxe budget. Hats off to Toyota for recognizing this. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Toyota, Aichi, Japan
ENGINE	2.4L inline-4 turbo, 16v DOHC, dual VVT-i
ENGINE HP/TORQUE	264 hp / 332 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.0:1
MOTOR	permanent magnet synchronous
MOTOR TORQUE (F/R)	F: 215.4 / R: 124 lb-ft
BATTERY	NiMH, 230.4V, 5.0Ah
SYSTEM NET HP/TORQUE	340 hp / 400.4 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	Direct Shift-6AT 6-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	full-time electronic AWD
0-TO-60 MPH	5.7 sec
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut, 27.2mm hollow stblzr bar
	R: multi-link, 23.0mm solid stblzr bar
STEERING	rack parallel-type elec pwr
BRAKES	F: 12.9 pwr-assist vented; R: 12.5 solid
WHEELS / TIRES	21-in alloy / 225/45R21
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	196.1 / 112.2 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.2 / 37.5 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.1 / 38.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY	(behind 2nd row) 15.2 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4343 lb
FUEL	87-oct or higher reg unl
FUEL CAPACITY	14.5 gal
MPG	29/32/30 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$53,070
PREMIUM PAINT: Heavy Metal	425
DESTINATION CHARGE	1095

TOTAL **\$54,590**
(See slight price increase, below.)

2024 TOYOTA CROWN LINEUP

HYBRID: 2.5L 4-cyl: 236 hp, eCVT	
XLE Hybrid AWD	\$40,350
Limited Hybrid AWD	45,950
HYBRID MAX: 2.4L turbo-4: 340 hp, 6-spd auto	
Platinum Hybrid MAX AWD	▼ 53,370

