

Among our very first features was the Toyota Highlander, by Larry Edsall, in our January-February 2003 issue (our second issue ever). We had envisioned more content along the lines of performance exotics and heroic off-roaders, but Larry was clearly enthralled with the Highlander, and we went with it. Recall, this is when there were only a few SUVs, and the crossover term was an outlier for a small handful of new vehicles. The Highlander, in other words, was a standout pioneer then and has proven to be a survivor of the top degree.

We've driven the Highlander many times in between, including as weekly vehicles, as our local get-arounds during out-of-state comparo events, and at the comparos themselves. It has always done well, but it's our most recent weekly that had cemented our appreciation of it the most solidly—a 2023 Highlander Platinum Hybrid AWD glowingly reviewed in our March-April 2023 issue, with considerable drive time including a special trip into a deep snowstorm above the Mogollon Rim.

Thus we have been eagerly looking forward to wheel time in the new Grand Highlander.

Three powertrains include a 265-hp 2.4L turbo gasoline engine with 8-speed automatic (up to 28 mpg highway); 245-hp 2.5L hybrid with CVT (up to 36 mpg city); and on ours a powerful 362-hp 2.4L turbo Hybrid MAX with 400 lb-ft of torque and direct shift 6-speed automatic (up to 27 mpg highway or combined). First thought might be that this is an extended version of Highlander, period. Highlander does already have a third row, though. Look again, and you'll find that while it shares the platform and powertrains (plus another), styling is completely different—taller, wider, beefier, for increased dimensions throughout, as well as a different personality. (Compare Highlander and Grand Highlander key fundamentals at right.)

While both bigger and more fuel economical, the Hybrid MAX is quick, with smooth power carving through turns, even in normal mode in town. We noticed almost a one-pedal-mode feeling,

which we like, from letting off the gas to full stop, presumably from its regenerative braking.

We came close to putting a couple of thousand miles on this, but as a scheduling conflict unfolded in real time, our biggest drive was from the Valley as far as Flagstaff, but then we had to turn around—up in early evening and back at night.

We did have a variety of unwanted lane control experiences on our open Interstate drive, based on lane striping and light neighboring traffic, as usual something you will experiment with until happy.

On the drive back, we switched to eco—it's fundamentally downhill all the way, so why not save some fuel? Our reading upon arriving in the valley was 30.5 mpg, including all our city driving, the climb up and the descent, well above its rating.

It's fun to debate whether they've just made a version of the Highlander that's a little bigger, or created a completely different vehicle. Highlander is one of the best, and as such, Grand Highlander is automatically worth a serious look. ■

UPSIZED AND TRANSFORMED

BY JOE SAGE



While the Grand Highlander is 6.5 inches longer, on a wheelbase 3.9 inches longer, interior dimensions are the big difference between it and Highlander. Third row legroom (at minor cost to the second in GH) and cargo capacity are the biggest, with headroom also greater. Hybrid MAX turbo is (so far) only offered on Grand Highlander. The Grand Highlander weighs a few hundred pounds more, depending upon trim level, and while most tow 3500 pounds, the Grand Highlander Hybrid MAX tows 5000. Turning circles are less than a foot different. Fuel mileage is very similar across both.

Key comparisons	HIGHLANDER	GRAND HIGHLANDER
HEADROOM (F/2/3) (moonroof)	38.4 / 37.1 / 36.1 in	40.0 / 38.5 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	40.4 / 41.0 / 27.7 in	41.7 / 39.5 / 33.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	16.0 / 48.4 / 84.3 cu.ft	20.6 / 57.9 / 97.5 cu.ft
2024 price ranges (AWD compared)	HIGHLANDER	GRAND HIGHLANDER
GASOLINE 4-CYL TURBO	5 trims: LE-Platinum: \$40,720-51,525	3 trims: XLE-Platinum: \$44,670-53,545
HYBRID 4-CYL	6 trims: LE-Platinum: 42,320-53,125	2 trims: XLE, Limited: 46,270-51,060
HYBRID MAX 4-CYL TURBO	(na)	2 trims: Limited, Platinum: 54,040-58,125

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Princeton, Indiana
ROWS / SEATS	three / seven (2-2-3)
ENGINE	2.4L 4-cyl turbo Hybrid MAX, 16v D-4S inj w dual VVT-i
HP/TORQUE	265 hp / 332 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.0:1
HYBRID SYSTEM	
ELEC MOTOR	perm magnet synchronous
BATTERY PACK	NiMH 5.0Ah, 288V
TOTAL SYSTEM POWER	362 hp / 400 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	direct-shift 6-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	full-time electronic AWD
MODES	sport-eco-normal; plus on AWD Hybrid MAX mud & sand, rock & dirt, snow
0-TO-60 MPH	6.3 sec
SUSPENSION	F: indep MacPherson strut w stblzr bar; R: multi-link w stblzr bar
STEERING	elec pwr asst rack & pinion
BRAKES	F: 13.38 vented; R: 13.3 vented
WHEELS	20-in alum alloy
TIRES	255/55R20 107V Yokohama Geolander X-CV touring a/s
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	201.4 / 116.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.06 ft
HEADROOM (F/2/3) (mnrf)	40.0 / 38.5 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	41.7 / 39.5 / 33.5 in
CARGO CAPACITY	20.6 / 57.9 / 97.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4920 lb
TOW CAPACITY	(gas, hybrid MAX) 5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	87-oct reg unl / 17.17 gal
MPG	(hyb) 36/32/34 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$51,060
PAINT: Ruby Flare Pearl	425
CARPETED MATS: floor, cargo	358
DESTINATION CHARGE	1395
TOTAL	\$53,238

Sicker price varies from most current, below.

2024 GRAND HIGHLANDER LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
GASOLINE: 2.4L turbo-4: 265 hp, 310 lb-ft, 8-spd auto		
XLE	\$43,070	\$44,670
Limited	47,860	49,460
Platinum		53,545
HYBRID: 2.5L 4-cyl hyb: 245 hp, (?) lb-ft, CVT		
Hybrid XLE	44,670	46,270
Hybrid Limited		51,060
HYBRID MAX: 2.4L turbo-4 hyb MAX: 362 hp, 400 lb-ft		
Hybrid MAX Limited		54,040
Hybrid MAX Platinum		58,125