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Toyota Prius 2016

A fresh new face for a new era

WORDS: *Tim Barnes-Clay* PHOTOS: *Toyota*



MAIN

Fresh new looks make the new 2016 Prius far more dynamic to look at and hints at the more sporty drive. Mr Barnes-Clay is not at the wheel.

The Toyota Prius doesn't have the look of a hero – but it is one – sort of. After all, the petrol-electric car bravely paved the way for hybrids when it hit the roads almost 20 years ago.

Back in 1997, the Prius was viewed by many in the same way one might look at an exotic animal in a zoo. We were mesmerised, but we were happier admiring the strange entity from a distance.

As time went on we realised how tame the Toyota was and we warmed to it. Then we accepted it. But it still has a face only a mother could truly love, albeit slightly improved with age.

Harsh? Perhaps. But the Prius has never been bought for its looks. Yes, it's more aerodynamically honed, but the fresh car's talents are really found in its use of an innovative platform - the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA). This boosts cabin space, chassis refinement and keeps the mechanical side of things neatly tucked away. It also helps to make the car lower. And that is key to how the Prius behaves on the road.

But before we got behind the wheel of the all-new Prius at its launch in Spain, we had to inspect the inside of the car.

The most noticeable aspect is that the characteristic

mid-mounted instrument panel is still present, but the cabin now has less switchgear. And that's a good thing, because simplicity definitely suits it better. The irritating parking brake that you have to operate with your foot is still in place. It's clumsy-looking and we don't like it. But, remember, the Prius isn't about aesthetics; it's more about logic. So, rationally, the lack of a traditional handbrake means there's more space between passenger and driver. The stumpy blue little gearstick hasn't gone away either. But we like that – even though it's set a tad higher up now. The plastic switches look cheap and smear easily when touched, although the quality of the materials used on the seats, headliner and dashboard is decent.

The car is as simple to operate as ever. Once the power button is pressed, the Prius' vital signs are shown with the word 'ready' glowing at you from the instrument panel. It's then just a case of slipping the car into 'D' for 'Drive' and silently whirring away under the stimulus of the petrol-electric Hybrid Synergy Drive's battery. When the pace is picked up, petrol-power then gracefully comes on stage





ABOVE AND MAIN
Biggest interior change is the loss of the flying centre console and a more minimalist design. Rear taillights are distinctive and new, but hint at past Prius designs.

and takes a bow.

There are three styles of driving you can choose from: Eco, Normal and Power. You can skip through these quickly by pressing a button, and the ante can be picked up slightly by switching over to Power mode. Indeed, on Spain's south-eastern Orange Blossom coastal roads, we were surprised at how entertaining the Prius could be when pushed into corners. It is, by no means, a car for driving enthusiasts, but due to its lower-slung deportment, body roll is negligible. This means the hybrid will thread its way around twisty tarmac - albeit rather clinically.

In town, the car is equally uncomplicated and light-footed. This became obvious when we needed to cut through the busy city of Valencia to find our hotel. It's a shame Toyota's dozy sat-nav isn't as efficient, though. The screen clarity is excellent, but some aftermarket navigation systems are more on-the-ball with voice instructions.

The all-new Prius uses a re-engineered 97bhp version of the 1.8-litre petrol engine found in its forerunner. And the familiar nickel-metal hydride battery pack that powers the 71bhp electric motor, is now 10 percent smaller. Crucially, it can recharge through the generator more quickly, by as much as 28 per cent. It is also now housed deeper under the rear seat, meaning there's no invasion of boot space.

But, as sure as eggs is eggs, the Prius never lets you forget that its main concern is fuel economy and minimal CO2 emissions. And here, more than anywhere, is where the Mk.4 impresses. The Japanese manufacturer's own figures claim the car discharges a notably low 70g/km of CO2 and is good for 94.1mpg. We achieved mid-80s performance after our mix of expeditious rural and stop/start urban driving.

It is more evolution than revolution with the all-new Prius. Sure, some things have altered; but due to the popularity of the last three generations, you can see Toyota has come to the broad conclusion that 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'.

First cars are delivered to UK customers this month (March 2016). **AV**



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

Boot is larger than the predecessor's; 457-litres minimum (w. temp spare wheel). Hybrid engine is more powerful than before but operates in the same manner and still uses Ni-MH batteries, unlike the Prius+. Centre console has had a major overhaul and is by far the better for it, with plenty of space inbetween the front seats.



Specification

2016 Toyota Prius

Engine	1.8-litre 4-cylinder
Transmission	Electric CVT
Power (petrol)	97 bhp
Power (electric)	71 bhp
Power (hybrid)	121 bhp
Torque (petrol)	142 Nm
Torque (electric)	163 Nm
Max Speed	112 mph
0-62 mph	10.6 secs
EV Range	~2 miles
EV Battery	Ni-MH
CO ₂ Emissions	70-76 g/km
Economy (avg.)	85.6-94.1 mpg
Weight (kerb)	1,400 kg
Price (from)	£23,295 (OTR)



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Figures may vary depending on different factors, including but not limited to individual driving style, climatic conditions, route characteristics and preconditioning.

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Finance example is for a BMW Select agreement for a BMW i3 with Range Extender with optional Sports Package and Fluid Black paint, with a contract mileage of 16,000 miles and excess mileage charge of 7.44p per mile. Figures shown incorporate HM Government Plug-In Car Grant. Applies for new vehicles ordered between 1 January and 31 March 2016 and registered by 30 June 2016 (subject to availability) at participating BMW i Agents. Retail customers only. *On the road cash price is based on manufacturer's recommended retail price and includes 3 year BMW Retailer Warranty, BMW Emergency Service, 12 months' road fund licence, vehicle first registration fee, delivery, number plates and VAT. ^Optional final payment and option to purchase fee not payable if you opt to return the vehicle at the end of the agreement (vehicle condition, excess mileage and other charges may be payable). Finance available subject to credit acceptance to UK residents aged 18 or over. Guarantees and indemnities may be required. Terms and conditions apply. Offer may be varied, withdrawn or extended at any time. 'BMW Select' is a form of hire-purchase agreement provided by BMW Financial Services (GB) Limited, Summit ONE, Summit Avenue, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 0FB. You will have a 14 day statutory right to withdraw from the agreement. Specialist Cars Ltd, trading as Specialist Cars, commonly introduce customers to a selected panel of lenders including BMW Financial Services. We may receive commission or other benefits for introducing you to such lenders. This introduction does not amount to independent financial advice. †Test drive subject to status and availability.