

# PROFESSIONAL Driver



## HARD **FIRST DRIVE** CHARGER

TOYOTA PRIUS PLUG-IN HYBRID BUSINESS EDITION PLUS



**PROFILE** 34  
NEW APPROACH  
TO FLEET FINANCE

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TO HIRE OR  
NOT TO HIRE?





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# Hard charger

**Tim Barnes-Clay**



TOYOTA HAS TAKEN ITS TIME launching a second-generation plug-in version of the Prius hybrid. The first edition, based on the Mk3 Prius, offered a scant 15-mile pure EV range, but carried a significant price premium, and found few buyers in the private hire market.

And remember, the private hire market loves the Prius. Everyone from self-employed Uber drivers to big fleets buys them in droves, especially in London, where more than 12,000 of the cars serve as PHVs.

But the forthcoming ULEZ rules, and their “zero-emissions capable” requirement means that despite its excellent 70g/km emissions performance, the standard Prius won’t be acceptable after 2020. While this highlights the stupidity of the TfL rules, there seems to be no backing down from the arrogant administrators.

So it’s just as well that Toyota has had another look at a Plug-in Hybrid Prius. The new version is based on the 2016 fourth-generation Prius, and there’s a little more to it than a simple upgrade.

It’s distinctive—the Plug-in Prius has a different nose to the standard car. Its front light clusters have been reworked and the whole appearance is rather ‘alpha male’, with an

aggressive road presence in the rear-view mirror. The tail is less hardcore, but a double-bubble rear windscreen and horizontal lights differentiate it from the standard Prius.

There are two versions of the new Prius Plug-in available in the UK—Business Edition Plus and Excel. The latter gets more luxurious leather seats and a little more tech—otherwise, the new PHV’s cabin materials are like the normal Prius—hard wearing and with more than a touch of refinement.

Alas, the irritating parking brake that you need to operate with your foot is still in place. It’s inelegant and we don’t like it. But keep in mind that the Prius is all about logic, so, rationally, the non-existence of a customary handbrake

Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid  
Business Edition Plus

first  
drive

means there's more room between passenger and driver. Unfortunately, it's only got two seats in the rear—so it's a strict four-seater—and the boot is smaller. This is all due to the bigger, newer battery.

However, Toyota argues this point, and claims that the two rear seats, divided by a centre console, offer maximised occupant space. That may well be true, but you can't get away from the low coupe-like headroom in the rear.

The luggage deck has also been raised by 160mm, and the 360-litres of loadspace, although looking reasonable in print, is shallow. This makes the packing of cases more of a chore than it should be.

Another irritant is the location of the charging cable. When not in use, this is kept in a cubicle at the edge of the boot floor, so you'd be making life difficult for yourself if you stuck luggage on top of it.

The Prius PHV is 4,645mm long, 1,760mm wide and 1,470mm tall. It's longer and narrower than the few rivals it has—Audi A3 e-tron, VW Golf GTE and the new Hyundai Ioniq. But the Prius' 360-litre boot is larger than any of its rivals.

This is one very ingenious machine, with some impressive features. The most outstanding is the solar roof panel that can place just enough 'oomph' into the Toyota's drive battery for an extra few free miles every day.

Costing £1,500, the photovoltaic tech can only be specified with the Business Edition Plus model. The panels nourish the car's main hybrid drive system to help with propulsion. Toyota calculates that, in the UK, the panels should be able to produce enough

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## FACTFILE

PRICE	£32,395
	<i>(Includes £2,500.00 plug-in grant)</i>
ENGINE	1,798cc 4-cyl petrol + dual electric motors
TRANSMISSION	Continuously variable
POWER	120bhp (combined output)
TORQUE	142Nm @ 3,600rpm (petrol engine only)
0-62mph	11.1sec
TOP SPEED	101mph
COMBINED ECONOMY	283mpg
CO <sub>2</sub>	22g/km
LENGTH	4,645mm
WHEELBASE	2,700mm
WIDTH	1,760mm
HEIGHT	1,470mm
LOADSPACE	360 litres
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	43 litres
WARRANTY	5 years / 100,000 miles
VED BAND	A



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power for 400 miles of electric driving annually.

Back in the cabin, the Prius' familiar stumpy blue gearstick hasn't changed, but we like that. The plastic switches look a little low-cost and smudge easily when touched, although the quality of the materials used on the headliner, seats and dashboard is class.

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 almost inaudibly whooshing away.

On the move, the car is hushed, helped by extra sound-deadening materials, and, when we did venture off the motorway on to Spanish rural routes, the Prius handled corners with barely any lean at all. This is down to retuned suspension springs and dampers. However, there is a trade-off—the tauter set-up means the car does bang and thump over potholes. Yet, back on smooth surfaces, the Toyota feels refined and, when using electric-only mode we found the car almost silent. Only the vague whistle of wind and tyre rumble disturbs the otherwise library-like calm in the cabin.

The Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid is packed with advanced active safety technology as standard. The Business Edition Plus brings a pre-collision system with pedestrian detection, rear-cross traffic alert, adaptive headlights and road sign assist. Move up to Excel, however, and you get front and rear parking sensors, voice recognition controls, and park assistance.

A large 8.8kWh lithium ion battery is housed under the floor of the Toyota's boot, together with a hi-tech electrical arrangement to move clout through it. This works well and provides some worthwhile shove, especially as the car also has a twin motor hybrid powertrain. This raises pure electric power from 71bhp to 101bhp. All this gives the Toyota five-door hatch a maximum speed of 84mph when driven in unadulterated electric mode. Mind you, you can only get away with this form of propulsion for so long—the electric range is 39 miles, but we only got 23 miles real-world.

The Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid also has a 1.8 petrol engine, and along with the electric wizardry, 120bhp is produced—giving a 0-62mph time of 11.1sec and a maximum speed of 101mph. Hardly breathtaking, but it's not abysmal performance, either.

More importantly, the Prius PHV breathes out a tiny 22g/km of CO<sub>2</sub> and it's possible to get 283mpg out of the car. No, that's not a typo—that's the claimed figure. Of course, reality doesn't always match up to what we're told, and on a



long motorway stretch, we only managed to get 59mpg—comparable to a standard Prius.

But then we weren't hanging around—and we hardly used electric mode. Instead, we mucked around with the 'Normal' 'Eco' and 'Power' settings, seeing what difference they made to the car. It's difficult to tell much change between 'Eco' and 'Normal'—but the 'Power' mode does give you a bit of a push in the back—and a lot more

noise—reminiscent of a slightly unhinged vacuum cleaner.

Once we'd stopped hammering the PHV and started using the electric settings, we achieved a hybrid-mode fuel economy figure of 69mpg—which is better than a lot of Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs) will do. Alas, that's only a tiny fraction—probably about 5mpg—better than you'd eke from a run-of-the-mill Prius.

## VERDICT



**AT £34,895 (EXCLUDING THE £2,500 GOVERNMENT INCENTIVE), THE Toyota Prius PHV is not a cheap car. And in simple product terms, it's hard to recommend the Prius Plug-in Hybrid over the excellent standard Prius – due to its strict four-seater configuration and its shallower boot.**

**And, with the tax changes in April, everything apart from out-and-out electric cars will be penalised. This makes the new Prius PHV seem almost pointless, especially when you consider plug-in hybrid purchasers will only be able to salt away £10 annually over petrol or diesel cars from the second year after a vehicle is registered.**

**But for London private hire users, that all-important zero-emissions capability will drive buyers to the plug-in – even those drivers without regular access to a charge point, and who won't use that electric range to the maximum.**