

SHIFT

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6 DAYS HYBRIDS (AND BURNT TYRES)

4TH GEN PRIUS

This has always been a love-hate relationship. But now they have updated the electronics, lowered the centre of gravity by managing to place the battery lower and provided a punchy 1.8 litre engine similar to the last one. The engine develops 95 horsepower with the battery kicking in for a combined rating of about 121 horsepower. Now, Toyota has started focusing on fun-to-drive strategy but this Prius is still rooted in its eco-friendly mode. The torque is available low down making it surprisingly interesting on the twisty and bend-filled track. But I have also driven the previous two and the new one drives better, turns sharper and has lost some of that previous boat-in-the-sea motion. And that too while seating four well fed adults comfortably.

That doesn't sound right, does it? Hybrids and burning tyres may be an oxymoron, but Toyota isn't having it any more with the image that Hybrids can't be fun. At least I don't think they are having it. Because they provided the mostly South Asian journo team with cars that ended up being mostly fun. Maybe they meant for me to drive along gently with the happy murmur of content polar bears cooing in my head.

Early September this year, Toyota invited us over to Japan's Fuji Speedway to understand and sample a range of their hybrid vehicles. They wanted us to know how serious they are about saving the world through continual tweaks. Here are six very different cars for possibly very different sets of people. And it rained.

Question is, did I learn anything?

ALPHARD

The 2016 Alphard is a massive full-size MPV big enough to lose people in. In fact, several of the attending journo haven't yet been found after they got lost inside an Alphard. The hybrid is powered by a 2.5 litre engine developing a surprisingly low 150bhp. Yet it

doesn't feel sluggish but the ride is super soft and super comfortable. So I did what you should never do with a cruiser van like this: I took a tight left hander as hard and as fast as I dared in the drizzle. It leans further than the Titanic but with traction on, it remains in line.

AXIO/COROLLA FIELDER

I like wagons. Wagons can be cool most of the times. This Japan only Fielder is a minor refresh in terms of design. Head and tail lights are now elongated to create a more squinty appearance front and rear. Which is cool. The inside is a bit Spartan. The dashboard is hard, clonky plastic and the engine noise and the sound of water splashing about permeates into the cabin. The

jewel is the 1.5 engine similar to the one on the Prius C and the battery pack gives a combined output of 100bhp. Which isn't much but in this segment power is less important than how it is delivered to average a claimed 33kmpl. What you really need is a whole bunch of these in Dhaka. Government needs to get rid of CNG for cars and encourage driving on hybrid power.



MIRAI

I didn't expect it, but this was more fun than it should have been. No one should have this much fun with an eco-car because then you're not really saving the planet. You're still killing it, albeit a little slowly. It is a hydrogen powered electric motor developing 152 hp and 247 lb-ft of torque. And all that

torque comes in instantly, especially when I am exiting a gentle S bend and heading for a hairpin left turn. Those skinny wheels squeal and scream and slide on the damp track. Suffice to say, that torque is intoxicating. But if you really want to save the world, stop lighting up the traction control symbol. The car is smooth and silent when driven gently.

CROWN MAJESTA

This 3.5 litre car is the sixth generation of the flagship full-size sedan from Toyota. Where these models previously preferred the V8, the modern tech manages to squeeze out way more power from a smaller capacity V6. A combined 338 bhp makes it far from a slouch.



This was the car given to us for a demo along a couple of tracks with cones. One was drenched with water jets and the other naturally soaked by rain the next day. Without traction control, this car is more than happy to push its tail out. Turn it on and the TC tries hard to drag the car into line. While it is loaded with safety features, if you are silly enough to push it close to triple digits and then turn hard, the car will slide out as one of our fellow journalists found out in a spectacular spin. In the end, all safety features will be negated if the driver is as sensible as Trump. But despite the size and the remoteness of the steering, you can dial it back in even when the rear starts to slide.

LEXUS RC 300H

Yep, petrolheads have probably skipped directly to this. The car looks striking. It has a lavishly leather clad interior with ridiculously tiny rear seats. It has a 2.5 litre turbo engine with an electric motor producing 220bhp. Which frankly isn't a lot because the car is heavy. But boy does it look good. The CVT manages to provide instant go that belies the weight. The steering is precise and super sharp but the handling is a little soft even when put into Sport. You can still comfortably exit tight corners leaving a trail of tire smoke in the rear view mirror. The car is averagely quick at 8.6 seconds to 100kmph but felt quicker each time I trailed back from the lead cars and then accelerated to reel them in. The gear-less CVT responds so much sharper than the typical 8-speed auto of the 200t models of this and the RX. It almost feels like sacrilege saying this hybrid is perhaps the best combo of a car: quick, fun and frugal.



So what did I learn?

For one, hybrids aren't for puttering about only. Toyota seems to be recapturing some of their lost mojo. Whatever happened to the fun AE86, JX Chasers and mid-engined Lucida vans? For most of 2000, they have been building reliable transportation for covering A to B. Now they seem to be injecting some fun in varying doses into even their least performance oriented cars. So now you can have fun AND be a responsible earthling. And also, the Mirai can lightly smoke tyres. Surprise.

WORDS & PHOTOS: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

Infographic: Shaer Reaz



SUPERCAR SHOWDOWN

Ford's seminal supercar, the GT, is possibly one of the most high-tech performance cars out there at the moment. Or at least, that's what Ford's spec-sheet says. Due to be released soon, the GT is expected to break new ground in the supercar category, taking on the likes of Ferrari, McLaren and Lamborghini. As the rivalries heat up, we take a look at what each of these bedroom wall posters bring to the table (or...wall?!).

Twin Turbo 3 litre V6 engine. 700 HP, 650 lb-ft torque. Rear wheel drive. 8 speed dual clutch auto gearbox.

Naturally aspirated 6.5 litre V12. 740 HP, 509 lb-ft torque (Aventador LP 750-4 SV). 7 speed ISR semi-auto gearbox, AWD.

Twin Turbo 3.8 litre V8. 666 HP, 516 lb-ft torque. Dual clutch 7 speed auto, RWD.

Twin turbo 3.9 litre V8 motor. 661 HP, 561 lb-ft torque. Dual clutch 7 speed F1 gearbox, RWD.

FERRARI 488 GTB

Estimated price: \$250,000.

McLAREN 675LT

Number produced: 500. Estimated price: \$349,500.

LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR

Number produced: 3,237 coupes, 1,488 roadsters (all models). Estimated price: \$402,000.

FORD GT

Estimated number to be produced: 500. Estimated price: \$400,000.

The Ferrari may have the rest beat on horsepower per price, but the Ford GT is well and truly at the top with its specs and advanced construction, not to mention the rarity. In the supercar club, rarity and top trumps count for everything, but can Ford ditch its blue collar badge and take on the Europeans?



AUTO NEWS BMW X2 CONCEPT

Presented at the 2016 Paris Motor Show, the BMW X2 Concept is a new addition to the long list of opinion dividing SUV designs by the German marque.

Following in the footsteps of the X6, the X2 is a compact SUV with a coupe inspired roofline and rakish front end that showcases a headlight treatment that has become the mainstay of the current generation BMW SUVs. That and the marketing jargon spouted by BMW PR gives out strong hints that the X2 will definitely make it into production, most likely as a slot-in between the X1 and X3.

Product diversification is good, but dividing ranges this thin already can't be a great idea, can it?

COLLECTIBLES



TOMICA'S PREMIUM RANGE

Tomica is Japan's biggest contributor to ensuring kids grow up loving cars. They've been making 1:64ish model cars for kids for almost hundreds of years now. They have been doing it almost that long now; long enough to make it a traditional toy. For those grown up, Tomica offers the upgraded casting for the Premium line. These have mostly proper proportions, accurate decals and most importantly those correct wheels.



version of the Countach is done in the right shade of blue with perfect five slot Lambo wheels, narrow up front and wide at the rear. The Subaru on the other hand comes with all the right stuff albeit for the oddly rubber spoiler at the back. It also appears just a tad wider than it

should be. Despite that, these look brilliant and usually cost within 600tk-1200tk depending where you buy them. Get from Japan, price is lowest. Buy anywhere else, 900-1200tk is a decent deal for these.

Cons: Don't roll them. The wheels will make a clackety-clack sound like a train. The wheels have small slot for holding the differently designed rims, and these cause that sound.

WORDS & PHOTOS: E. R. RONNY

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