

TEST DRIVE



HYBRID AHOY

2019 Toyota Camry Hybrid

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW
The Toyota Camry, since the late 80s, has been a veritable superhero among cars, but a masked one. Like Superman, it has hidden in plain sight as a reliable, capable force of good—that no one ever recognises. I have one—the 1992 SV30 model—and it's spawned memes on the internet about how Toyota should recall the model because its owners should've moved on to something else by now. While memes are undoubtedly a standard of quality and assurance, it's mostly true—the Camry has been one of the best-selling medium sized cars in the United States for 15 years straight thanks to its reputation for taking whatever abuse you throw at it. Now, the 2018 model adds a dash of style and new-age hybrid tech to the mix.

WHAT'S IN THE NEW ONE?

In brief, it's an evolution of all Camrys of the past. It seeks to combine Toyota's rock solid reliability with a hybrid powertrain that livens up the driving experience while providing decent fuel economy returns. Under the hood is a 176 HP/163 lb-ft 2.5 litre 4 cylinder petrol motor, and hiding behind the wheels is a 118 hp/149 lb-ft synchronous AC motor. Combined, the petrol-electric hybrid powertrain produces 208 HP, routed through a CVT gearbox to the front wheels. 0-100 km/h takes about 7.9 seconds—impressive, considering the size and weight of the 1658 kg sedan.

The engineering directive from the Toyota upper management for this generation of the Camry was centred on a more involving

drive—taking aim at the Germans with their patented approach. As a result, the Camry is lower and wider than the previous model, a 30 percent stiffer torsional stiffness for the body. The rear features a new multilink setup and the steering feel has been sharpened up.

The interior gets top-notch materials with wood and leather and brushed aluminium, as well as an expansive panoramic roof and the standard infotainment features. There's plenty of cubbyholes and cupholders, the main difference being in how the hard plastic surfaces are disguised. The interior has all the plushness you'd expect in this price range, with a good sprinkling of upscale designer touches that you would not.

THE GOODS ARE GOOD, BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

The Camry is an entirely different beast from the outgoing model.

It accelerates enthusiastically, with the demeanour of a much more powerful vehicle, thanks to the push of the electric motors. The slight sluggishness of the previous Camry's power delivery is all but gone, replaced by a joyous, addictive thrust when you want it.

The sharper dynamics of the steering and suspension setup inspires confidence and, uncharacteristically for a Toyota, actually urges you to push it some more. It's not a sport sedan by any means, but it has a lively outlook on taking corners that adds to the list of the Camry's competencies.

The view out of the cabin is impressive, thanks to the door mounted mirrors and



forward sloping hood. The driving position and visibility means you won't ever have any difficulty in manoeuvring the large-ish sedan in traffic or around a crowded parking lot, especially with assistance from the parking sensors and rearview camera. The panoramic roof and large windows lend a feeling of airiness within the cabin that is hard to beat in this segment.

WHAT ABOUT SAFETY?

The Camry gets a 5 star safety rating for both

passengers and pedestrians, as tested by the North American NHTSA. Turns out, that gaping front grille doesn't actually go around swallowing pedestrians. There's airbags all around, along with a whole host of sensors and a very handy rear-view camera.

SO SHOULD YOU GET ONE?

Definitely, if you can afford it. At around TK 89 lakhs, it's a huge investment in a Toyota. However, given the driving dynamics and overall polished personality of the Camry, the

SPECS

ENGINE: 2.5 litre 4-cylinder petrol (176 HP, 163 lb-ft) and permanent magnet synchronous motor (118 HP, 149 lb-ft), Total combined output 208 HP.

TRANSMISSION: CVT, FWD.

SAFETY: ABS VSC, EBD, ESP, ten airbags.

FEATURES: Dual zone automatic climate control, 17-inch alloys, panoramic roof, cruise control, leather seats, park assist with reverse camera, touch screen infotainment system, push start, LED automatic headlamps.

PRICE: Starting from TK 90,00,000.

For details, contact Navana Ltd.

price is almost warranted. It does everything its German rivals can do, with a solid injection of reliability and build quality that comes with the Toyota badge.

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Spanners in the works—how labour unrests shaped the auto industry as we know it today

Since the early days of the automobile, the importance of skilled labour was readily understood by the pioneers of the industry and in most cases, exploited. Henry Ford's innovative new assembly line method of manufacturing cars brought the automobile to the masses (or at least some portion of it) in the form of the Model T, but as expected of a nascent industry, working conditions were less than satisfactory. The size of the market was also an issue—in the early days of the industry, the market was just not big enough to afford the kind of changes to worker benefits that would've afforded them a decent living. Thus, over time, the auto industry has seen frequent disruptions on the labour front that have changed the way manufacturers operate and treat workers.

The United States, the birthplace of the assembly line, saw its first major clash with worker unions in December of 1936. With the effects of the Great Depression weighing in, the United Auto Workers (UAW) led occupation of General Motors' Fisher Body Plants No.1 and No.2 in Flint, Michigan, resulted in the signing of a contract with UAW that guaranteed better wages and a more humane work week. With a significant victory under its belt, the UAW saw a rapid national expansion that brought unionisation to the assembly lines of the US auto industry. From there on, the UAW would play a crucial role in safeguarding the interests of the US auto workers, largely due to the inherent mechanics of mass assembly, which responded well to targeted strikes—halts in specific parts of the production process could effectively coerce the factory owners to consider workers' demands.

Detroit, still heralded as Motor City—the heart of America's auto industry for nearly a century—had initially attracted automakers due to the anti-union policies implemented by the Employers' Association of Detroit. When the global oil crisis struck in the early to mid-1970s and the American consumer shifted to purchasing more fuel efficient imports from Japan, the union strikes in the factories spilled over onto the streets. Rather than fight a battle



on two fronts—their own workers and the threat of foreign competitors—American manufacturers chose to relocate to cheaper shores. Detroit's auto industry is yet to recover, more than four decades later.

Europe, on the other hand, initially lagged behind the US in its adoption of the assembly line. Even though it was the birthplace of the automobile itself, Europe's largest manufacturers—the likes of Benz, Opel and Austin—still relied on a leisurely pace and hand craftsmanship to build cars. European coachbuilding was expensive and time consuming—whereas the average US auto worker could afford to own (after some savings) the vehicle he had helped manufacture, that was simply not true for auto workers across the Atlantic, even with significant savings. Following the Second World War, there was a huge influx of investment in Europe's infrastructural capabilities, especially in manufacturing. General Motors, Chrysler and Ford dumped millions into German brands like Opel and Vauxhall, while effectively exporting techniques and mass production know-how. With a foot in Europe, US auto brands grew ever larger. It was only

a matter of time before trouble with workers resulted, however.

In the late 1960s, Italy saw rolling strikes that spilled over into political avenues, in what is known as the "Hot Autumn" of worker unrest. FIAT's factory saw frequent closures and the biggest manufacturers were forced into corners that demanded better wages and benefits for workers. Unionisation was more readily achieved in Europe than the US, a fact that is prominently displayed in the fall of British Leyland. From 1975 onwards, union strikes at the British behemoth reached critical mass, exploding into a series of rolling strikes that brought the entire industry to a grinding halt. "Mini cars, mini pay"—referencing the iconic Austin Mini—brought on stark contrasts of a factory building a peoples' car favourite but sacrificing the very people who built them. Iconoclasts like Derek "Red Robbo" Robinson became household names, gaining instant fame for leading the charge of the auto workers against their giant, corporate employers.

British Leyland may have fallen—chopped up into tiny segments and sold to the lowest bidders—but most manufacturers survived



due to an outside force that had not come into play before. Automation—the use of robots and pre-programming—would see brands like FIAT bypass worker unions' demands and adopt a policy of aggressive automation, reducing the number of employees from 140,000 to 90,000, seemingly overnight, in the early 1980s. In the US, the same thing was happening, despite a growing market and economic booms.

The constant search for cheap, disciplined labour led the giants of the US, Germany, France and the UK led them to various corners of the earth. Brazil, South Korea, South Africa and more recently, China, were all valid candidates. In Brazil, on May 12, 1978, the day shift workers entered the Saab-Scania plant's tool room in Sao Bernardo but refused to start up their machines. The strike quickly spread to the whole plant with thousands of workers standing by their machines in silence with their arms crossed. From Scania, the stoppages spread to other auto plants—Mercedes, Ford, Volkswagen, and Chrysler. Within a few days, workers were crossing their arms and refusing to work in all the major plants.



Everywhere the global manufacturers went, labour unrest followed, despite growing margins and a constantly rising consumer base. With automation reaching unprecedented levels of accessibility and sophistication, manufacturers are seeing fit to replace human skills with robotic precision in order to meet ever growing demands. In newer markets like India and China, manufacturing is leapfrogging several decades in the transition from agricultural dependency to industrial dominance; farmers are having to stand up to giant corporations in order to preserve their lands and livelihoods.

The future looks bleak. With so much of the world's focus on trade liberalisation, open borders, increasingly advanced technology and ever growing competition, there is no guarantee that even skilled labour will have their place in the global auto industry. The average auto worker's life has constantly come under threat for nearly as long as the industry has existed—it's a sobering reminder of the exploitation that often persists behind consumer choices.

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