



## PUSHING TRAFFIC ON A BUDGET: TOYOTA AXIO HYBRID

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Toyota Corolla; a well-recognised name in many families through countless generations, is known as a nice, cheap, and well-rounded car that rarely breaks on you, giving countless reliable miles.

Although the new Corolla might have a different name on its badge primarily, I can assure the Toyota Axio that is going to be featured this week is similar to all the predecessors, which undoubtedly, is a Corolla.

Keep reading to find what the new Toyota Axio Hybrid has to offer.

### The basics

If you have a budget between 18-20 lac Taka to purchase a car, choices either land between the second-hand market or the budget-oriented side of the recondition market, where choices are tight.

Among the popular options, stands the Toyota Axio, a compact sedan that



comes in both gasoline and hybrid variants. Although the hybrid variant that we are going to discuss today tends to be the better car to push traffic with, the gasoline version comes in cheaper.

### Design

The design of the newer shape Axio is interesting. It is a sedan on the smaller spectrum of the bunch but Toyota pushed the design team to make the car look larger than it is. The front bumper has a large linear grille design, where half of it is functional with slit cutouts to direct cold air to the radiator.

Above that, rest the headlights with HID halogen lamps, coming standard with all trim levels. The design on the rear fascia is subjective, where the boot does not sit flush with the tail lights



(which come with LEDs), where it might look like the Axio lacks rear boot space, but there is plenty.

### Interior

Climb inside the Axio and you will find appropriate knobs and buttons on the right positions, which are clicky and responsive. The version we tested had



fabric seats, which were comfortable enough but felt narrower than usual. The steering wheel is made of leather, which feels synthetic but the quality is solid. The buttons on the wheel feel responsive, primarily used for taking calls and adjusting the volume of the speakers; where the OEM sound system has a

surprising amount of clarity and bass. Jump in the back seat and you will find there is just enough room for two people to fit comfortably, the third person needs to be cramped inside; comfort depends on the size. But other than that, the back seat feels far from a bench; the cushion backing it up is soft enough to make the ride comfortable.

The knob on the gear lever is small but has a weight to it, making it feel a tad upmarket. Driving the car, the steering feedback is light where you might think it's lacking response, but the bumps give it feedback, still overly dampened nonetheless.

Throttle response is nice and punchy, when pushing hard, the acceleration is smooth but, since the engine is paired with a CVT transmission, some lag between gear shifts is expected. The suspension system of the car does an above-average job in clearing small bumps and potholes, but even on bumpy roads, the steering feels overly dampened.

The Axio shines in the traffic jams though. Manoeuvring the car is easy and the added low-end torque is prominent when going for gaps in traffic as the car easily cuts through spaces swiftly. Visibility is great and the car is easy to get used to, where you can have a good sense of what is going on inside and outside your field of vision.

### Verdict

Budget oriented cars are usually hard to discuss and in most cases, as these cars mostly spend a large fraction of their life cycle getting driven, where good reliability is an essential and often a highlighted aspect of the car, where the Axio does not disappoint.

Spare parts are easily available which even tin shed mechanics can install in no time and with regular maintenance, workshop visits are a rare case scenario. Although the steering response could be better, pushing traffic with the setup does not feel like a chore.

Thus, the Axio can be an easy bargain to get your hands on, and since this is a Toyota, it will not disappoint in the long run.

### Technical specifications

The Axio under our hands came with a 1.5L 1NZ-FXE hybrid engine, when broken down, it is the same revised 1NZ-FE engine with an electric motor backing it up for the initial torque at low speeds, where the engine is least efficient. Toyota calls the whole technology "Hybrid Synergy Drive", adapted from higher-end Toyota and Lexus models respectively. Other than that, the engine is finally paired with a CVT gearbox when combined, produces 109 HP and 136 Nm of torque. The Axio can also be driven in full-electric mode until 20 kmph, where then the engine kicks in for the extra power.

### Driving the Axio Hybrid

Jump in the driving seat and

## On the road to an electric future

ABDUS SALAM SHAWN

Bangladesh is now nearer than ever to joining the global trend of switching to electric vehicles in the name of saving the environment and cutting down costs. In fact, we are very close to manufacturing electric vehicles in our country.

Local automobile companies such as Bangladesh Auto Industries Ltd (BAIL) and Nitol Motors have been working since 2019 to set up plants to start manufacturing locally. Regulatory policies for EVs are also getting prepared to facilitate importing of EVs. Initiatives from the government, private and international companies present a promising future for EVs in Bangladesh.

The prime minister envisioned an electricity-run transport system when

BRTA, the road transport regulatory agency of Bangladesh, has also been working on a draft policy to expedite the import and domestic manufacturing of electric vehicles. The draft discusses Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations construction plans and tariffs. It is currently undergoing review by a committee and will be presented to The Road Transport and Bridges Ministry, where it will be finalised, according to sources.

Electric Vehicle Registration and Operation Guidelines-2018, by BRTA, was first drafted in November 2018. Since then, it has been updated and appears to be on its way to being finalised. It will also bring illegally run electric easy-bikes under control.

On the other hand, the Automobile Industry Development Policy 2021, drafted by the Ministry of Industries, has been okayed by the cabinet, according to multiple reports. It aims to develop the automotive industry in the country and gradually become an exporter. The enterprising policy demands tax holidays and fiscal incentives for investors for producing EVs and parts, tax benefits, restrictions on reconditioned vehicles, fiscal

coronavirus pandemic.

With a planned project cost of Tk 350 crore, the Ishwardi plant of Nitol will roll out 20,000 units per year. They will have a driving range of 200 km and cost Tk 10-12 lakh. The model, named Suvare, will have a top speed of 120 km per hour.

The plant in Ishwardi and a research and development centre in the capital's Uttara has already been set up. The changed target to start producing cars is by mid-2023.

### International help

Bangladesh's willingness to provide land and resources to help develop EVs manufacturing in the country has already started attracting international companies.

Omega Seiki, a member of the India-based Anglian Omega Network, plans to invest Rs100 cr (Tk 116 crore) in setting up electric vehicle development projects in Bangladesh. A UK based energy and environmental consultancy firm, Ricardo-AEA, is persuading the United Kingdom government to invest funds in this sector. The United Nations Development Programme has also offered \$1.78 crore to support the charging station infrastructure.

### Barriers

Speaking of barriers, coordination among government agencies related to EV is not yet present, and that creates a great roadblock.

UNDP states that the lack of infrastructure, concerns about the lithium-ion battery's longevity, cost and maintenance of EVs, lack of technical guidelines and regulations will demotivate potential buyers and investors.

The registration cost of EVs is higher than combustion-engine cars and battery production is still very expensive; much of the components and equipment are still being imported. Subsidies on EV production are still not offered in Bangladesh.

### The way forward

Electric vehicle's share in the global automobile industry is rising quickly and conventional cars are declining. General Motors announced that it would stop selling petrol and diesel cars by 2035. The European Commission unveiled a proposal on 14 July that would effectively ban the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles by 2035. The UK is banning all new conventional petrol and diesel cars by 2030; hybrids will stay until 2035 provided they meet certain strict criteria.

The prime reason behind the world's fascination with EVs is that they have zero tailpipe emission, cost less per kilometre, have fewer moving parts making servicing easier, and so on.

Bangladesh cannot stay in the combustion era forever. Ours is an environmentally tormented country, and to preserve it, we need to make the transition even quicker.

The government's concerns about the environment should come in the form of proper regulations and coordination among related agencies. Expenditures on research and development on EV technologies should be subsidised. Policies taken should be aimed towards encouraging local manufacture of components and reducing dependence on imports.

At this point, Bangladesh seems to be excited about EV technology, but how much of it is realised will be seen through proper initiatives and their implementations.

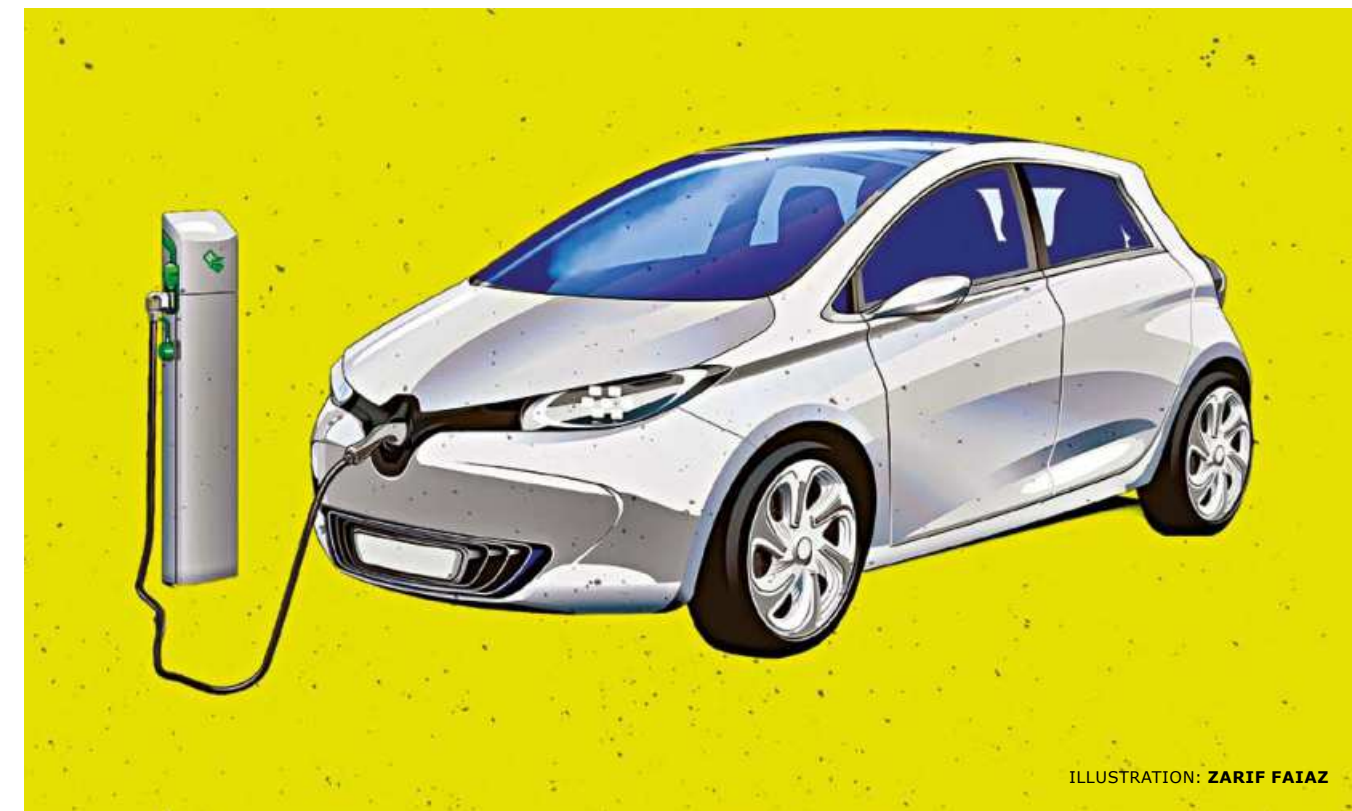


ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

launching new power plants in September this year. Our country lies in a geographically dangerous zone with temperature rise and being one of the prime victims of climate change. The government's concerns regarding the climate issue coupled with our expanding economy seem to create a demand for an efficient and safe transportation system.

### Government initiatives

The state-owned transport corporation, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation, BRTC, is going to introduce 50 e-buses to the public transport system on long routes such as Dhaka to Chattagram. The project will be financed through foreign loans and the Bangladesh Government. If everything goes to plan, the buses will hit the road within two or three years.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority,

incentives for research and development and a few more benefits.

### Private ventures

Bangladesh Auto Industries Limited (BAIL), a local automotive company, was set to manufacture EVs locally from 2020 collaborating with firms from the US, China, India and Italy. It was supposed to complete the planned plant on 100 acres of land at Mirsarai economic zone by the end of 2020 and begin manufacturing in June 2021.

However, the plans have been pushed back due to the global pandemic because suppliers could not ship the required equipment on time.

Nitol Motors, in partnership with one American and two Chinese companies, also planned to start manufacturing EVs in 2020 but had to delay the process because of the