



TOYOTA AXIO OR HONDA GRACE

Which one should you go for?

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If you have a budget of Tk. 20-22 lakh and planning to buy a mid-sized daily driver sedan to get around the city, you either have to seek the second-hand market for old Premallions, which is always a gamble to buy or you could play a bit safer and get your hands on reconditioned vehicles such as the Toyota Axio or Honda Grace. These old reliables are among the most popular cars even today, getting more and more common around

Dhaka city and cementing themselves as the top choice among the budget-oriented reconditioned markets. However, with the same price range and so many similar features, which do you go for? Toyota Axio or Honda Grace? Here are some key differences to consider.



HONDA OR TOYOTA?

First and foremost, both are fantastic choices for sedans. The local consumers tend to be biased toward Toyotas, owing to consistently high resale values and the city mechanics being familiar with Toyota cars' ins and outs. On the other hand, Honda offers Grace in the same price range - making it a worthy contender owing to most features being similar, with some being arguably better. Since Honda in general has become more common on Dhaka roads over the past couple of years, mechanics are also extending their arsenal towards fixing Honda vehicles. Within the next few years, you can expect that fixing your Grace will be as smooth as fixing any other car in this country.

Specifications

To keep this comparison as parallel as possible, we are going to compare the new shaped Axio (2015 and later facelift model) with the 2014-2015 models of Grace. These are both midsize sedans with an FF layout - both come as a hybrid and only the Axio comes with a petrol-only option. Both the Honda Grace and the Toyota Axio have an optional AWD and, in terms of engine size, both have a 1.5L four-cylinder engine. Toyota uses its infamous VVT-I technology and Honda uses its Variable valve timing and lift technology, which is also known as VTEC. While these cars seem to be very similar, these are just the basic specs. You will see later that these vehicles are quite different and distinct from each other.

Design and exterior

When it comes to looks, the Grace looks a



bit more bold and well thought out. The exterior is a bit larger than the Axio and overall looks more "mature", whereas the Axio is a bit smaller compared to the Grace and looks a bit more sporty and agile. The rear end of the Axio is a difficult design to judge, as the trunk does not sit flush with the bumper and taillights, thus looking like something is missing. The rear end of the Grace, on the other hand, is put through nicely and everything is flush and nothing sticks out like a sore thumb. Of course, subjective interpretations aside, both the vehicles are excellently designed and at the end of the day, everything, especially the design, narrows down to personal choice.

Interior and infotainment system

Since both of these cars are meant for daily driving, the interior space is equally important for the driver and the passengers riding in it. The Axio has slimmer, more open fabric seats compared to the Grace where the seats, still fabric, are bigger and have larger bolsters which provide better support when taking turns. Both the Axio and Grace have leather steering wheel options and an analogue speedometer with an additional display to show miscellaneous information about the vehicle. The infotainment system in both cars is basic and provides necessary features such as Bluetooth pairing for hands-free calling and music. Both cars also come with backup cameras. Overall, the features and materials are nice and neither company skimped on the interior.

Engine and fuel consumption

Both cars come with 1.5-litre engines as standard with a CVT gearbox. However, if you look hard enough, you can sometimes spot 5-speed manual Axios out in the wild as well - models extremely rare in this country and very hard to come by. The petrol models come with a 1.5L engine which is honestly no surprise at this point, packing 109 hp and 138 Nm of torque and the hybrid version, unfortunately, loses additional power, having the same engine, where it narrows down to 74 hp and 111 Nm of torque. The Grace, on the other hand, comes with a hybrid-only L series engine with the Honda Earth Dreams hybrid technology paired with a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission - packing more power than the Axio, averaging 110 hp and 132 Nm of torque. Fuel consumption is comparatively low as these are hybrid vehicles, where the Axio averages at 20-22 km/l in the city and 26-28 km/l on highways. The Grace averages 18-20 km/l in the city and 20-22 km/l on highways.

Which one to get?

Overall both of the vehicles offer good options for the price they have been set for but, when push comes to shove, it all depends on personal choice and what you are looking for. Toyota offers superb resale value and a slightly better fuel economy but Honda is providing better materials and driving experience and most experienced users would agree that the Honda Grace is subjectively a better-looking car than the Axio. In the end, judge the features (and the looks) yourself and go with what your heart decides. You honestly can't go wrong with either.

THE GRIM FREELANCING REALITY

ZARIF FAIAZ

Not too long ago, freelancing was deemed an exciting career prospect for thousands of skilled Bangladeshi youths. The rapid digitalisation of the country, combined with a rising number of skilled, educated, but unemployed workforce—and consistently low market wages—contributed to a freelancing boom in Bangladesh over the last decade.

Statistics paint a happy picture too. The Bangladesh Freelancing Development Society (BFDS) sources state that there are at least 10,50,000 active freelancers in the country, although unofficial numbers put that figure at a much higher estimate. According to a Payoneer study, Bangladesh was also the 8th largest exporter of online labour in 2019 and consistently ranks as one of the top

featured and highlighted in one of the world's top freelance marketplaces was a huge honour. It was a testament to his professionalism, skill and record.

But despite such accolades, Sudiptta, who is a designer by profession, shares what it is actually like being a freelancer in Bangladesh. "I had to muster up a lot of courage when I first decided to quit my job and start freelancing full-time. Because I knew it would not be easy. I knew very few would accept it as a recognised and respectable career path," he shared.

Sudiptta shared how banking services seem to discriminate against freelancers who are not usually able to show a traditional income source. "It is a painstaking process to open a bank

cannot communicate on time, or submit projects on time. This brings down our image and lessens our chances of getting more work because the client will just give the work to someone who is more efficient and timely," he shares. "Often, I have to work overtime to make up for the lost hours. And no one prefers working overtime."

For others, like Sourav Sarker of Chandpur who works primarily with digital marketing, the outages ate into the hourly wages. "If I cannot bid on a project on time, I do not get that project. It is usually that simple," shares Sourav. "I have also had cases where the scheduled power outage of one hour went on to last for three hours and I could not submit my project on time. The client ultimately gave me a bad rating and it definitely affected my profile."

Sourav mentioned how freelancers from remote villages of India had better prospects than their counterparts in Bangladesh because they had access to better resources and scopes of training. "They get to learn a lot. They have an organised community. They have scopes of training and many of them get offered permanent relocation options in places like Silicon Valley. Although we are doing good, we can barely even dream of such things," he says.

When asked if he is part of any freelancer's organisation, Sourav says that he is not. He also mentioned that he knows many freelancers who work out of a rural setting and that nobody ever tried to reach out to them with support.

"We hear of many things from time to time—like government-issued ID cards, or special provisions and training etc. But in reality, I don't think I know many freelancers who have ever been supported by these government-led programmes," he shares. "I am not even sure if they exist in reality."

When contacted, Dr Tanjiba Rahman, the current Chairman of BFDS, mentioned that the ID card project is running in full swing with 7000 ID cards already distributed and nearly 50,000 applicants currently awaiting their turn. Freelancers in Bangladesh are thriving despite their struggles and the many obstacles that hold them back. The current energy shortage only worsens that crisis and opens up a new floodgate of obstacles. But the future remains hopeful as more youths—particularly those who are in rural or marginal areas of the country—take up freelancing as a source of stable income, paving their own paths to success.

Nonetheless, a lot remains to be done. One can only hope that the government and the concerned authorities will do everything necessary for the sector to prosper.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

countries preferred by employers.

But despite the conditions working out to their apparent advantage, freelancers in Bangladesh still remain one of the least supported communities. Lack of appropriate payment gateways, struggles in availing seamless banking services, and the general lack of recognition—all add up to a freelancer's woes. Now with the global energy crisis and supply shortage, the reality on the ground is grimmer than ever before.

The state of rural freelancers

Based out of Khulna, Sudiptta Apu is a successful freelancer who was recently featured in Upwork's 2022 spotlight—a segment that highlights the story and profile of Upwork's top-rated professionals. For Sudiptta, being

account when you are a freelancer and they ask you to show proof of income," he shares.

"As freelancers, we are remittance-earners. The government deducts taxes when we receive our income. Why is it that we are not recognised properly?"

He says that despite several promises, the government has failed to bring services like PayPal in the country, making it difficult for Bangladeshi freelancers to compete freely in the global market. And he shared how the recent power outages cut into the working hours, making it difficult for local freelancers to communicate with their clients abroad on time.

"Our clients who are abroad, often fail to understand that we are facing troubles because we have no power. Often we