

Toyota Yaris Hybrid

By Jim Mc Cauley

For many, holidays begin in the restrictive queuing of an airport departure hall but for someone who flies weekly to drive new cars along some of Europe's most demanding roads, a different and much more relaxing approach is needed.

Forget the need to count the cost of extra suitcases, measure them against the varying



demands of each airline, weigh them and separate the various volumes of liquids; consider the alternative and simply pack everything into the boot and drive off.

Destination was England's Lake District and chosen crossing was the relaxing luxury of one of Stena Line's latest ships now docking at their new Scottish terminal at Cairnryan. These latest additions to their Irish Sea route have replaced the HSS catamarans which costal objectors and prohibitive fuel costs have rendered obsolete. Having driven Toyota's all-new Yaris Hybrid in Holland, I was holding a suspicion that the absence of uphill challenges on the

country's flatlands was to keep fuel consumption well biased on the side of respectability. So it was the same vehicle I opted to take on holidays, travelling four-up and with a full complement of luggage.

The car is surprisingly roomy – a prime requirement for a week's holiday driving, and also very comfortable and accessible with no complaints from the rear seat occupants including myself when we did a driver change.

And the rear seats are always the best position in which to judge a car for ride and noise suppression as most designers and engineers appear to throw in the towel when they have the front of the cabin sorted.

The Hybrid derivative is the flagship model in the new Yaris range making it the only car in its segment to offer a choice of petrol, diesel and hybrid powertrains. The hybrid addition differs from the other models with its stronger front-end styling which introduces the company's new design signature and adds just 20 mm to its overall length.

But more importantly, Toyota has revised its full hybrid powertrain so that it can be installed without diminishing its performance or encroaching on the passenger and luggage room of the standard car. The 1.5 litre engine is mated to a more compact electric motor and battery pack than in the Auris Hybrid, in a car that is now marketed as a mainstream model rather than as a niche product. Competitive pricing further reinforces its mainstream positioning with expectations of 20 per cent of all Yaris European sales.

At start-up and lower speeds, the vehicle runs in electric-only mode while power allocation in normal driving conditions is constantly metered between the engine and

electric motor to maximise performance and fuel efficiency. Driving through its constantly variable transmission (CVT), the Yaris Hybrid can reach 62 mph (100km/h) from rest in 11.8 seconds with the potential to cross into three-figure higher speeds.

On road, and the car moves off silently – and sharply - able to reach 30 mph in just 4 seconds. As the engine cuts in, there is little discernable increase in noise and the car continues to maintain its refinement right up to higher road speeds.

Much work has been done to lighten and revise the engine over the previous generation version used in the Prius, and the same with the electrical side, so it comes as no surprise to find the car's handling comfortably on par with the two other engine options even when

fully loaded on this holiday trip. The only downside is the over-revving of the engine as the CVT chases higher ratios when the throttle is floored for sharper acceleration. However, Toyota claims that this historic CVT problem has been addressed in this application and the over-revving has been limited compared to what it might have been.

Instrumentation is clear and concise with power balance graphics included, while audio controls on the two higher specification models are courtesy of a central touch-screen. Across the range, integrated satellite navigation is optional with clear duplicated instructions comfortably in advance of required manoeuvres. The cabin provides comfortable 4-seater space and a 286-litre boot, extendable through the folding rear seats, provides adequate carrying volume for a car of this size.

But the ultimate attraction of the Hybrid is that it looks like a 'proper' car and hopefully persuades other manufacturers that hybrids and electric vehicles don't for some unexplained reason have to look seriously silly. This also confirms Toyota's conviction that the hybrid derivative is a mainstream model reinforced by its sensible pricing and low running costs.

Trim-wise, the car is available in Toyota's familiar range of T3, T4 and T Spirit



options with prices starting at £14,995 and stepping through on approximately £1,000 increments. The standard of equipment in the T4 model featured was very good and included seven airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, dual zone air conditioning, electric front windows and 6-speaker audio equipment. This model also comes with 15-inch alloys, Bluetooth connectivity and auxiliary media sockets, DAB radio, rear view camera and leather trimmed steering wheel.

Overall, the Yaris Hybrid is testament to Toyota's commitment to dual-powered

vehicles and their successful positioning as the world's most prolific producer of hybrid technology. Like the larger Auris, it integrates the power option into an established model range and extends customer choice where economy and environmental protection are important considerations. Officially the model can aim for a fuel consumption of over 80 mpg in mixed driving, and keeping the test vehicle in its standard drive setting (an Eco choice is also available) I was able to approach 60mpg over 600 miles with the car carrying a full holiday load.

The relatively long and demanding drive confirms the economy appeal of the car over long distances as well as its ability in low-speed town situations to run on electric-only mode for a limited period. But it also thankfully lacks something, and that is the quirkiness that characterised the earlier hybrid models. The latest Yaris is very much mainstream and a car that delivers well on a daily basis. Paired with the relaxation of a Stena sea crossing both added to the holiday experience.

With a CO2 emissions of under 85 gms/km, it is in Band A for zero annual car tax, and for company car users it qualifies for the lowest possible Benefit in Kind rating of 10 per cent. The Toyota Yaris Hybrid provides the security of a 5-star EuroNCAP crash test rating and is covered by the company's 5-year / 100,000 mile warranty with further extended battery cover.