

The Toyota Auris - more than just a badge?

By  Ané Theron

27 Jan 2017

December on the coast of the Western Cape. Not exactly the place to go for a peaceful, quiet festive season – but this is where I call home, and I wasn't going anywhere. I knew I would probably have to move into an underground bunker to avoid the madding crowds, but the occasional dash to the shops (for chops), would be unavoidable.

I chose the Toyota Auris as my holiday wheels, because practicality trumps everything during the busiest of holiday seasons. Imagine trying to maneuver yourself out of trouble in a Mercedes-Benz Vito or Hyundai H-1 bus? In the more compact Toyota Auris X1 hatchback (R298,800), I'd have a much better chance of returning home without parking lot-induced scratches and bumps. So how convenient is the Auris for everyday use?



It's not in the looks, it's in the resale value...

“A Toyota in your garage is like a cheque in your pocket”: the favourite saying of Land Cruiser owners in the Middle East. But what about the Auris – is it really such a value proposition, despite not being as well-equipped as some of its rivals? The coveted Japanese carmaker's badge counts for a lot in South Africa. Toyota equals reliability – that is the general consensus anyway. So the Auris already scores points, even though it isn't the most exciting thing on four wheels. From a design perspective, there are a few better-looking hatches out there, but I must admit, I find the Auris's streamlined silhouette (especially in this colour!) rather handsome.



The inside job

The Auris Xi is very much a mid-range buy, but the interior looks stylish enough. A large centrally-mounted screen with cool blue backlighting, provides the option to choose between AM/FM, CD, USB and Bluetooth media sources. It took some time figuring out and getting used to, which almost encouraged me to get all my messages and phone calls out of the way before setting off on trips. On the upside, having a CD player is almost a rarity these days, with manufacturers offering only USB/SD card functionality.



Even though we'd all prefer leather seats, the upmarket material of the Auris Xi's seats proved to be rather durable. I don't normally allow the kids to eat in the car, but I gave in, to prevent a looming post-nap temper tantrum. In the end, strawberry ice cream was had, and messed – but easily cleaned. The seat colour is a winner for hiding blotches!

And what's the holidays without a trip to the overcrowded beach? That's where the large 360 litre boot came in handy, fitting all the beach paraphernalia for a family of six (the other family members went in their own car, but we ended up carrying everybody's stuff). In this price range, the only hatchback with a bigger boot is the Chevrolet Cruze Hatch, with 413 litres.

As for legroom, the fully grown rear-passengers in the Auris were not disadvantaged. I once sat in the back (to clean the above mentioned ice-cream mishap) and my legs had much room for stretching out. There's also space for large bottles in all four door pockets, and a useful cubby above the gear lever for pocket change or small valuables. There's a 12V power socket in front, as well as the back, and the centre armrest fits another two water bottles.

The driving experience

With a naturally aspirated and rev-happy 1.6-litre petrol engine, the Auris is fun to drive, with good body control and little body roll. Another perk is the leather-covered steering wheel (who wants to grab hold of polyurethane?) with satellite controls. It's exactly the right thickness, and the steering itself is not vague or numb. Compared to the over-assisted steering in the Kia Cerato hatch 1.6 EX (R299,995), it actually feels quite direct.

It also has a pinch more Kilowatts (97) and Newton metres (160) in the trousers than rivals such as the previously mentioned Cerato. Yet again, the Chevrolet Cruze hatch 1.4T LS (R301,400) beats both the Auris and Cerato with its turbo technology, which affords the Cruze a healthy 103 kW and 200 Nm. (The facelifted Cruze will be launching in SA soon.)

Fuel consumption in the Auris is decent, with a very small difference between town and open road driving. Most of the time it was either 7.2 to 7.4 litres per 100 km. Your best bet for exemplary fuel usage would be the Ford Focus 1.0T Trend (R278,900) with its award-winning three-cylinder EcoBoost engine, which will give you a thousand km on a single tank, if you drive conservatively.



Is the Auris the one to consider?

This is a very personal question – it depends whether you are a Toyota fan through and through, or not. Compared to the Ford Focus 1.0T Trend, Kia Cerato Hatch 1.6 EX and Chevrolet Cruze 1.4T LS Hatch, there are a few places where the Auris Xi falls short. The Focus, Cerato and Cruise all have six airbags, but the Auris has only four, and no cruise control, traction/stability control or fog lamps. As a mom, I would prefer my kids to have the protection of the curtain airbags in the back, if possible. But if no-one is ever going to ride in the back and resale value is more important, the Toyota wins.

Facts and figures

Model name: Toyota Auris 1.6 Xi

Price: R298,800

Engine: 1.6-litre, naturally aspirated, four-cylinder

Transmission: 6-speed manual

Power: 97 kW

Torque: 160 Nm

0-100 km/h: 10 seconds

Airbags: 4

Boot size: 360 litres

Warranty: 3 years

Service Plan: 5 years

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course.

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