

Toyota Urban Cruiser 1.5XR MT: Brand loyalty reinforced

 By [Alan Duggan](#)

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Brand loyalty is a funny thing... occasionally illogical and often counterintuitive, it informs our purchase choices, our peace of mind and perhaps even our sense of belonging - for instance, if we both swear by Nike trainers and scorn other footwear brands, we probably belong to the same tribe. Take the case of Toyota's Urban Cruiser, on test this week, and Suzuki's equally beguiling Vitara Brezza. Aside from badges and a few styling tweaks, these compact crossovers are essentially the same car, but you can be sure that a certain buyer - perhaps convinced by past experience of the brand or a trusted dealership close to home - will opt for the Toyota without hesitation, whereas another may choose the Suzuki because it enjoys a similarly good reputation and has a better service plan.



Image credit: Alan Duggan

When it comes to the automotive world, emotion trumps logic so often that it's not worth debating. Anyway, since this review deals with Toyota's newly introduced Urban Cruiser, that's what I'll be talking about. For starters, I like the body design, the free-reving engine, the slick gearshift and the steady roadholding. All of this inspires confidence.

Other appealing attributes include the infotainment system and its 7-inch touchscreen — featuring Android Auto, Apple CarPlay and a useful rearview camera — and the multifunction steering wheel, which makes it easy to set the cruise control, adjust the audio volume, and make and accept calls without taking your eyes off the road. Oh, and the function known as park distance control (PDC), which saved my bacon when a cowboy sneaked into my parking bay without warning as I was about to reverse.

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Alan Duggan 22 Jul 2021





In the cabin, the stress is on no-nonsense functionality rather than gee-whiz aesthetics. Think hard plastics, a relentlessly black dashboard and comfortable seats covered in a resilient if somewhat sombre fabric — if you were expecting hand-stitched Recaro seats and leather from hand-reared calves, you're looking in the wrong place.

I drove the Urban Cruiser to the seaside settlement of Scarborough on the Cape Peninsula, where it attracted a fair amount of attention. One admirer asked me to lift the bonnet to show him the engine bay, then sighed with satisfaction when he saw the exposed engine and its associated bits and pieces.

"You can see everything and work on everything," he exclaimed. Having spent the past few years driving a little French car with absolutely everything shrouded under plastic covers, requiring the removal of half the bodywork to replace a headlamp bulb, I knew what he meant.



The Urban Cruiser's engine bay | Image credit: Alan Duggan

Although the Urban Cruiser is ostensibly a 5-seater, I would be inclined to stick with four occupants on longer journeys, when rubbing shoulders could take on new meaning. The space behind the rear seat is adequate but probably not big enough for the annual family getaway - but then again, the same probably applies to most of the crossovers and compact SUVs in this price segment.

With the driver's seat in the optimum position, there's still enough knee room for the rear-seat passenger — a real treat after driving a small car with so little space at the back that I habitually adopted the pose of a T.Rex on the school run, with my forearms resting on the steering wheel. Not a good look.

Price and competition

There are five derivatives in the Urban Cruiser lineup. Starting price is R255,300 —for the 1.5 Xi MT, moving up to R273,200 for the 1.5 Xs MT — R294,800 for the auto version — and R300,400 for the 1.5 XR MT — R322,000 for the auto.

Competition? Suzuki's Vitara Brezza is the most obvious one, but you might also consider Nissan's new Magnite, which comes in at a lower price but has a smaller, albeit impressively efficient turbocharged 1-litre engine. My inclination, based on a heady mixture of brand loyalty and memories of cars that seemed to go on forever, conveniently ignoring the fact that I haven't even seen the Brezza up close, let alone driven it: Toyota.

Just the facts

- Price: R300,400
- Top speed: 170km/h
- Engine: 1.5-litre, 4-cylinder petrol
- Max power: 77kW at 6,000r/min
- Torque: 138Nm at 4,400r/min
- Transmission: 5-speed manual
- Seating capacity: Five
- Luggage capacity: 328l
- Safety: Driver and front passenger airbags
- Driver support systems: park distance control (PDC), antilock brakes, electronic brake-force distribution (EBD)
- Fuel consumption, combined cycle: 6.2l/100km (claimed)
- Luggage capacity: 328l
- Kerb weight: 1,130kg
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km

ABOUT ALAN DUGGAN

Alan Duggan was the founding editor of *Popular Mechanics* in South Africa and is a former motoring correspondent for the *Sunday Times* and other publications.

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