The 2019 Toyota Corolla Hatchback, reviewed

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- The 2019 Toyota Corolla Hatchback.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Forgive me, I was unable to capture the wonderful Galactic Aqua Mica paint on our test car.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The Corolla Hatchback starts at $20,140 for a manual SE model.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The interior is minimalist but effective. Although we have to have words about the infotainment system.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- These aren’t quite extinct yet.
  Jonathan Gitlin

- There’s 29.9 inches (760mm) of rear leg room.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The trunk has a capacity of 18 cubic feet (510L).
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The main instrument display.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Entune 3.0. It might be a modern infotainment system built on Automotive Grade Linux but the UI reminds me of Windows 3.0.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- The main menu.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Radio play.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- If you want navigation in the base car, you need to have your phone with you.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Third-party apps.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Even though the UI is horrible, Apple CarPlay are here.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- This is what CarPlay looks like on the Corolla’s screen.
  Jonathan Gitlin
- Hello to Jason Isaacs!
  Jonathan Gitlin

I’ll admit to being a little trepidatious reviewing the Toyota Corolla Hatchback. I didn’t exactly gel with the new Camry, and the two cars share the same underpinnings. Not that Toyota needs my approval—as with the Camry, people will buy the Corolla regardless of what any journalist says about it.

Toyota wouldn’t be where it is today without this car, which is now in its twelfth generation. The company has sold at least 43 million Corollas, and the name may as well be a synonym for “people’s car” at this point; its sales surpassed the Volkswagen Beetle more than 20 years ago. The Camry might

have been Toyota's biggest US hit, but beyond these shores, in places where average salaries and parking spaces are much smaller, the Corolla has filled the niche of an affordable, reliable, dependable little car. And when the $23,140 Corolla Hatchback XSE arrived here for testing, it won some instant brownie points for having three pedals. Yes, Internet people, break out the party balloons: you can still get this one without an automatic transmission.

This latest Corolla is all new, derived from the Toyota Next Generation Architecture (TNGA). That's the toolbox of assemblies and subcomponents that has also given us the aforementioned Camry, Avalon, RAV4, and the current Prius. The Corolla is a small car, measuring 169.9 inches (4,315mm) long, 69.9 inches (1,775mm) wide, and 57.1 inches (1,450mm) high. That actually makes it a tiny bit shorter (in both length and height) than the outgoing model, but the wheelbase is 1.5 inches (38mm) longer. This translates into some extra room for stuff in the back.

Did Iain M. Banks name this stuff?

My first meeting with the 2019 Corolla Hatchback was at last year's NY auto show, where we awarded it Best New Small Car. Under the convention center lights, the show car's bright blue paint did a lot to make it stand out. But even in more subdued hues I think the shape is a handsome one—something I can't bring myself to say about much else in Toyota's current lineup. Our test car came clad in the wonderfully named Galactic Aqua Mica paint, to which the photos do absolutely no justice. The various design ideas that went into the Corolla feature even more wonderful names, though: *Under Priority Catamaran*, *Keen Look*, and *Shooting Robust* sound more like the names of Culture Ships in an Iain M. Banks novel than corporate design philosophies, which further endears the car to me.

The love-fest continues on the inside. It’s a simple cockpit, but I like minimalism, and here it’s done well. In fact, it’s almost Mazda-level. Everything feels properly screwed together, and there’s not a lot to distract you in the car. The steering wheel is standard-issue Toyota, nicely wrapped in leather—as is the knob atop the tall gear lever. A six-speed manual is an option regardless of trim ($20,140 for the SE, $23,140 for the XSE), or you can pay $1,100 more for a CVT automatic. It seems almost everyone chooses to pay more; this week CarBuzz found out that 85 percent of Corolla Hatchbacks come with only two pedals.

It’s not a particularly enjoyable car to try to drive fast. It isn’t so much the fault of the engine—the 2.0L four-cylinder unit combines direct and port injection to provide 168hp (125kw) and 151lb-ft (205Nm) of torque, which is perfectly cromulent for a small car. The tires, on the other hand, were much less keen, with understeer aplenty for anyone expecting a *Gran Turismo* driving experience. (Toyota would rather sell you an 86 if that’s what you’re after.)

Still, those 85 percent of buyers who opt for the automatic are missing out, because the Corolla Hatchback was an enjoyable car to try to drive *well*. Driving anything manual these days is becoming a rare opportunity, so perhaps this is just nostalgia, but I can only report I feel more engaged in the driving experience when I have three pedals and a stick to row. Be aware, though: opting for the manual means giving up some fuel economy. The EPA rates the manual Corolla Hatchback XSE at 28/37/31mpg city/highway combined; the CVT-equipped car is rated at 30/38/33mpg.

Infotainment lets the side down

Because Toyota knows most people aren’t going to be white-knuckling a Corolla through the twisties, the car also includes Toyota’s suite of driver assists. Most of these are

standard throughout the range—collision detection, pedestrian detection, lane departure warnings, adaptive cruise control. All cars also get the same 8-inch Entune 3.0 infotainment system, and optioning up will increase the speaker count.

After being so effusive about the rest of the Corolla, I must whine a bit when it comes to Entune. It’s a thoroughly modern infotainment OS, built on Automotive Grade Linux, and it comes with Apple CarPlay (but not Android Auto until MY2020) and some robust third-party app support. Which makes it even more unfortunate that it’s saddled with a horrid black-on-red UI. Also, you’ll need a cellphone, or an XSE with the preferred package ($1,600), if you want navigation.

Still, it’s not a deal-breaker. Our preferred hatchback in this segment remains the Mazda 3, or perhaps the Golf GTI if you’re looking for something with a bit of pep. The Corolla might not be quite on that level, but it’s definitely no dud.

Listing image by Jonathan Gitlin

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