

Toyota's 2023 Prius: Lamborghini looks meet fuel-sipping economy

Enlarge / The Prius used to be considered quite cool back when it was the first mainstream hybrid on sale. Now in its fifth generation, the new one finally looks really cool.

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156 with

"It looks fast," said my neighbor as they eyed the sleek blue car parked in the shadow of their big BMW X5. That's understandable; from time to time, there are quite fast cars parked in my spot, and this one looked the part, with a steeply canted windshield and big open-spoke alloy wheels wrapped with low-profile tires. In this case, looks are deceiving because the car in question was not a sportscar, it was the new Toyota Prius. Which, no, is not fast at all. But it is rather economical.

Design

The new Prius is a relatively small car by 2023 standards; even with the slight growth in width, it measures 181.1 inches (4,600 mm) long and 70.2 inches (1,783 mm) wide and, in Limited trim, stands 56.3 inches (1,430 mm) high. (Smaller wheels drop 0.4 inches/10 mm in the process.) In fact, that's about as tall as a Corolla or Camry, yet neither of those cars has the stage presence of this Prius.

That's because it has had a radical style upgrade for its fifth generation. It's lower and wider than before and no longer looks like two different cars crashed into each other. Instead, there's a more acute A pillar than you'd find in a Lamborghini Huracan, and the aerodynamicist's touch is clear in the scalloped sides and cut-off tail.

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- The design at the rear is all about controlling airflow and preventing the attachment of a wake that can drag on the car.

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- The sides are cut away from the B pillar to the rear wheels to make the shape more efficient.

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Despite that, it's a draggier shape than the car it replaces. Toyota says the drag coefficient is 0.27 on 17-inch wheels, but only the entry-level Prius LE (\$27,450) rides on those; every other trim comes with 19-inch wheels that probably increase the Cd to 0.29. But as the more pedantic will know, it's the combination of drag plus frontal area that counts, and although the older Prius had a Cd of 0.24, the two-inch reduction in height should mean the new car comes out ahead.

Powertrain

Toyota has stuck with a parallel hybrid powertrain for the Prius, but it's not just carried over from the old model. The Atkinson-cycle engine has grown in capacity to 2.0 L, and the engine on its own generates 150 hp (112 kW) and 139 lb-ft (188 Nm).

That joins forces with a permanent magnet AC synchronous motor providing 111 hp (83 kW) and 152 lb-ft (206 Nm), both of which drive the front wheels, with a combined output of 194 hp (145 kW). And instead of nickel metal hydride, the traction battery

is now lithium-ion, which is smaller and lighter. Battery capacity has increased slightly, to 1.5 kWh.

New for this generation of Prius is the (\$1,400) option of electric all-wheel drive; this adds a 40 hp (30 kW), 62 lb-ft (85 Nm) interior permanent magnet motor to the rear axle, raising overall combined power by a couple of horsepower in the process.

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