

Road beat: A minivan worth consideration



The Toyota Sienna is a mini van that has style, room and power. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Let's get something straight right from the start, minivans may be the most practical vehicles ever designed and with the new Toyota Sienna it gives away very little to other kinds of vehicles in performance and handling. But it has more utility than any other kind of vehicle. Sure, you're not going to take it racing at a local track, but not so fast. As a support vehicle or even a tow vehicle it would be second to none with its 3,500 pound tow capacity.

Minivans are a simple upright two box design. But clean lines

and a slick upslope nose give them a bit of style. The Sienna is at the top in that category with an excellent window line and no unnecessary add-ons. In fact, its cleanliness is reflected in an extremely slick coefficient of drag of 0.308.



Specifications

Price \$30,000 to about \$47,000

Engine

3.5L DOHC 24 valve with VVT-i V-6 266 hp @ 6,600 rpm
245lbs.-ft. of torque @ 4,700 rpm

Transmission

Six speed electronically controlled automatic

Configuration

transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive/all wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 119.3 inches

Length 200.2 inches

Width 78.1 inches

Height 68.9 inches

Weight 4,375 to 4,705 XLE AWD

Track (f/r) 67.7/67.7 inches

Ground clearance 6.6 inches
Turning circle 37.4 feet
Steering lock to lock 3.44 turns
Fuel capacity 20 gallons
Wheels 17X6.5 inch standard/18X7/19X7 inch optional
Tow capacity 3,500 pounds
Coefficient of drag 0.308
Cargo capacity 150.0 cubic feet (behind first row)

Performance

0-60 7.44 seconds
50-70 3.94 seconds
50-70 uphill 6.03 seconds
Top Speed Faster than a speeding freight train
Fuel economy 18/25/21 mpg city/highway/combined (6 cyl, FWD), 16/23/19 mpg city/highway/combined (V-6, AWD. Expect 20-22 mpg in rural country driving and 28 mpg at constant legal speeds on the highway.

As a full-size minivan its dimensions are standard with a long wheelbase of 119 inches, a length of 200 inches, width of 78 inches and a height of 71 inches. Those are almost identical numbers of your standard full size SUV. While it may be dwarfed by a full size trucked based van, minivans are anything but small. That's why they hold eight people in comfort with almost 40 cubic feet behind the third row. And this mini is no lightweight, tipping the scales at a portly 4,700 pounds for this AWD model. An FWD version saves you about 200 pounds.

So Toyota wisely makes its 3.5L DOHC 24 valve workhorse standard in all models, knocking down 266 hp at 6,200 rpm and 245 pounds of twist. The engine is also producing 220 hp at 4,700 rpm where peak torque is developed. Power is sent to the front wheels via a six speed auto cog swapper, except in this AWD version all wells are driven.

Sienna moves out quite smartly conquering the 0-60 mph acceleration benchmark is a short 7.44 seconds. That's rockin' for a 4,700 pound minivan and probably quicker than most V-8 full sized vans. And that performance run is backed up with surprisingly good 50-70 mph passing times of 3.94 and 6.03 seconds on a level highway and up a 6 percent grade. My advice is not to get into a traffic light drag race with Sienna or you might get embarrassed.

But here is the Sienna minivan bonus great full economy. The EPA says you should expect in the AWD model 16/23/19 mpg city/highway/combined, but my test vehicle did much better, even better than the 18/25/21 mpg that the FWD model should achieve. I averaged 21 mpg in mixed rural driving with some moderate traffic and with the cruise control set at 70 mph, the trip computer average 28 mpg on a two way run with only me on board.

Sienna is suspended with a set of MacPherson struts up front and a twisting torsion beam in the rear with antiroll bars at both ends. Coils are at all four corners. Enhancing its cornering ability is a track of 68 inches front and rear. It doesn't get much wider and makes for a stable platform. The electric steering rack is a bit slow at 3.44 turns lock to lock and in high speed twisties it needs a bit more driver attention (than a sporty sedan) to point the vehicle correctly as it otherwise has surprisingly good cornering power. In the tight twisties, the Sienna could handle the change in direction at much higher speeds than expected, however because of the softer suspension and a bit of float you had to guide the Sienna with a bit more attention and steering input. Body

roll was nicely controlled. Sienna turning circle is a tight 37 feet and it does ride on large 18 x 7 inch wheels. One very minor complaint never before found in a Toyota, the steering wheel was off center by about 3 to 4 degrees to the left.

Ride quality was compliant and smooth helped by its long wheelbase. Road noise was a bit higher than expected on coarse roads, perhaps hurt by the stiffer sidewalls of its run-flat tires. But on most other roads the Sienna is quiet with no noise coming from the engine room as it spins a low 2,000 rpm at 70 mph.



A mini van with comfort in mind.

Braking is by four-wheel discs (vented up front) with a strong pedal stopping the Sienna in a good 45 feet under perfect control from 40 mph. Sienna has all the safety acronyms, plus more than half a dozen airbags, Safety Connect emergency assistance and collision notification, rear view camera, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert and rear parking sonar in case you forget there is a rear backup camera. Sienna has so many anti-collision devices you would think you would have to work at having an accident.

Now for the real reason why everyone should own a minivan, the interior. There is no other vehicle that packs so much volume and utility in such a relatively small package. Passenger volume is 165 cubic feet or about 60 percent more than your

average midsize or full size sedan. And on top of that there are almost 40 cubic feet of cargo capacity behind the third row of seats. Shoulder room in each of its three rows is over 5 feet and about 5½ feet in the first two rows. Legroom is in limousine proportions and President Abraham Lincoln could sit in any seat with his top hat on. And this is all packed into a 200-inch vehicle and this one has all wheel drive. Where do you get more utility than that?

Oh, and that interior was done in quality leather and all the appropriate appointments were of Toyota's top quality materials. Of course it had a full instrumentation package (tach and speedo), trip computer and a sound/entertainment system second to none.



Plenty of room for families,
lots of friends or an entire
team.

Pricing for my fully loaded tester was \$41,710, plus \$860 for the truck from its Princeton, Ind., manufacturing plant. In addition it had the Limited Premium Package (\$4,105), a Limited Convenience Package (\$890) which included excellent HID lighting. Unfortunately they want \$330 for floor mats, but there is a lot of flooring to cover. But in the final analysis, Sienna offers the most practical vehicle one can buy. What vehicle can do more, offer decent fuel economy combined with sporty performance and with AWD not be hampered by poor driving conditions? Only the minivan, the Sienna

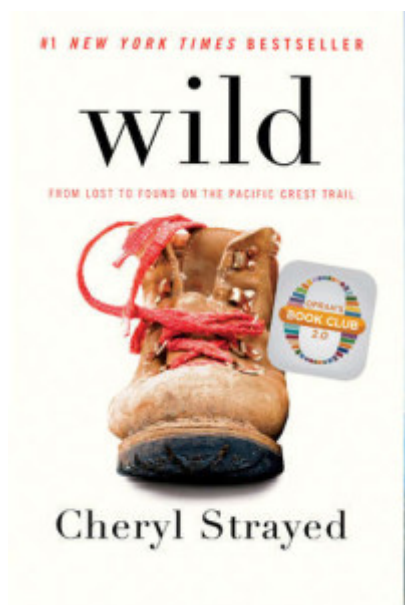
minivan.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.

‘Wild’ – a book of self-discovery along the PCT

By Kathryn Reed

It takes a certain type of person to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. Well trained and experienced are not requirements. Cheryl Strayed proved that.



Her *New York Times* bestseller “Wild” is a testament to how tenacity and perseverance are two important components to backpacking one of the West’s most famous trails.

Strayed’s memoir came out in 2012, while the film starring Reese Witherspoon was released earlier this month. The book is a definite page-turner.

My mom and I last weekend were reading it, with me a few

chapters ahead of her. We had to drag mom out of the house to snowshoe because she was so engrossed in the book. She would come downstairs saying something in disbelief about Cheryl – as though we are on a first-name basis with her. And we jokingly referred to Cheryl as “our new best friend” because of how much conversation centered on her.

The fact Strayed survives out in the wild for the better part of a summer is remarkable based on a number of factors – starting with she had never backpacked before, her pack was so heavy she was stooped over and her boots caused her to lose multiple toenails.

If you are looking for an in-depth look at the PCT – a true outdoors book – this isn’t it.

“Wild” is about a woman who in her 20s lost her mom, divorced and saw her relationship with her siblings unravel. The backpacking excursion was about finding herself and overcoming obstacles that were not just on the trail – though there were plenty of trail encounters that also led to a better understanding of herself and the way her life had turned out to that point.

SnowGlobe vibrates with techno flare

By Kathryn Reed

Meghan Trainor’s song “All About that Bass” could be the anthem for SnowGlobe. It really is all about the bass. And that’s just what fans of this three-day music festival in South Lake Tahoe want.

It was a raucous eruption of DJ induced music by Disclosure that brought screams from the crowd at the main stage on Dec. 29. The throngs of people bounced to the beat as the techno sound reverberated across what is normally the community ball field next to Lake Tahoe Community College.

Dressed in all sorts of headware – from beaded masks to ski beanies to SpiritHoods to lighted get-ups – the rave is a place for self-expression.

With lights illuminating their jackets, friends Tori Kobayashi of Sacramento and Lina Kudinar of Fremont made the trek east for their first SnowGlobe experience. It was all about the lineup of artists that brought them to Tahoe. Disclosure and Porter Robinson topped Kobayashi's list of people to hear. For Kudinar, the big draw on Monday night was Thomas Jack.



Emancipator Ensemble has people bouncing to the sound on Dec. 29 at SnowGlobe. Photo Copyright 2014 Carolyn E. Wright

“The vibe here is better than other places. There’s more chill here,” Dylan Bivens, who graduated from Whittell High in 2008 and now lives in Reno, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He has a three-day pass for his third SnowGlobe.

At the Sierra tent Bro Safari was a big draw as people spilled out into the walkway. Not being able to see the stage is no big deal – the sound is blasting forth.

Exaggerated icicles hang from the roof like something that could have been from “Alice in Wonderland”, changing color as the strobe lights lighted the three-sided tent.

SnowGlobe is considered a boutique festival, but is still able to bring in some of the biggest names in the business. Zedd won a Grammy this year for best dance recording. He will be on the main stage New Year’s Eve. He’s ringing in the New Year at a gig in Las Vegas, while Flume does the honors at SnowGlobe.

Now in its fourth year, SnowGlobe is a multi-million dollar event when it comes to the economic impact on the community.

“I heard from a number of lodging properties and the association that if it were not for SnowGlobe again this year, they would have few bookings due to the lack of snow,” City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Chad Donnelly, the promoter of the three-day event, is expecting crowds of 15,000 each night.

Traffic was a nightmare on both ends of town hours after the concert had started at 2pm Monday – with vehicles backed up on Echo Summit, and Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail near Stateline cluttered.

For those in the neighborhoods, it was a mixed night of disturbances because of the booming bass.

“About 8pm the SnowGlobe bass got extra strong for a few

minutes and Charter cable went goofy. I had it on a TV cable music jazz station with my sound bar bass higher than usual, so we were co-existing pretty well but for the occasional thought that there was a semi-truck going down our street,” Diana Hamilton, who lives near LTCC, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Another nearby resident told *LTN*, “This year’s first night at 6-ish is like last year’s last night at 10. At times it can be like living in a duplex with the world’s worst neighbor and other times not so bad.”

The city is monitoring complaints and ensuring the bass does not exceed the decibel level outlined in the three-year contract with Donnelly. (This is the first year of the contract.)

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Notes:

- SnowGlobe is Dec. 30 2:30-11pm, and Dec. 31 2:30pm-Jan. 1 at 1:30am.
- The city’s complaint hot line is 530.542.6001.
- There will be fireworks each night.

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Netflix countdown helps fool kids on NYE

By Frank Pallotta, CNNMoney

NEW YORK —Thanks to Netflix, many parents will be ringing in

2015 a few hours early.

While the childless might be popping Champagne and staying out late, 87 percent of parents are planning to celebrate New Year's Eve with their kids, according to a Wakefield Research survey conducted by Netflix.

Midnight, however, is a bit late for most youngsters. Already, 34 percent of parents "fool" their kids into thinking it's midnight at an earlier time.

That is why Netflix created an on-demand countdown hosted by King Julien, the animated lemur from the company's series "All Hail King Julien." Families can start streaming it any time they please.

Read the whole story

Anderson to compete on 'Celebrity Apprentice'

By Nick Zaccardi, NBC

Olympic champions gymnast Shawn Johnson and slopestyle snowboarder Jamie Anderson were announced as NBC's "Celebrity Apprentice" season seven contestants.

Anderson, a resident of Meyers who rides for Sierra-at-Tahoe, won gold in the Olympics earlier this year.

It's the first time since the third season that the Donald Trump show will include Olympians.

Other contestants this season include Johnny Damon, Kate

Gosselin, Gilbert Gottfried, Terrell Owens, Geraldo Rivera and Ian Ziering.

The season premieres Jan. 4 on NBC.

Read the whole story

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Jenni

Jenni is a nice 11-month-old gray tabby cat who does well with other pets.

She would also be fine as a single pet. In the shelter, she amuses herself by playing with the toys in her kennel. Jenni likes to play rough and wrestle and will sometimes play bite when she gets over excited, so might be best in a home without small children. Cat adoption fees are discounted at the shelter for the rest of December, just \$40.

Jenni is spayed, microchipped, tested for FIV, and vaccinated. She is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting

for their new homes.

Go to the Tahoe animal shelter's Facebook page to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call 530.573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Sleep plays a role in weight loss

By Mark S. Aloia, Huffington Post

Most people take a common set of steps when preparing to lose weight. Pick an activity. Pick a diet. Cut out junk food. Pick a start date. Recruit support. One step, however, is typically missed, and recent research suggests it is as important as anything: Review your sleep habits.

We all know how sleep can affect us. A poor night often results in complaints of low energy, poor work performance, and irritability. We may even recognize that we tend to be less active after a night of poor sleep – but most of us do not pay much attention to how sleep may affect our eating behavior.

Think carefully – do you ever crave certain foods after poor sleep? Personally, my sleepless nights are often followed by cravings for “comfort foods,” which can be high in fat and

carbohydrates. And science confirms it. More and more scientific literature is pointing to a tie between the amount of food we eat, our food choices, and the time of day when we eat – all factors that could keep the number on the scale from dropping.

In experiments comparing short sleep duration (about five hours a night) to more normal duration (seven to eight hours a night), researchers have found that study participants who are forced to shorten their sleep crave the high fat or carbohydrate laden foods later at night, and they eat more than people who sleep longer.

Read the whole story

Tahoe nonprofit gets boost from ski resorts

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

Skiers can save money on lift tickets and help a good cause this winter thanks to a partnership between Tahoe SAFE Alliance and three of the region's biggest mountain resorts.

The alliance serves as a support network for victims of domestic abuse and other forms of violence in the North Tahoe/Truckee area, and also works to prevent abuse and violence in schools and communities. Their services include legal consultations, safe housing, peer support groups, counseling and education.

This season SAFE (Stopping Abuse for Everyone) Alliance will continue an annual tradition of selling discounted tickets to

Heavenly Mountain Resort, Northstar and Kirkwood Mountain Resort at \$70, a cheaper alternative to standard adult lift tickets, which are typically priced in the \$90 to \$120 range.

Vail Resorts Inc., the company that oversees the three local resorts as well as destinations in other states, gave the nonprofit a bundle of 300 tickets in the weeks before Christmas. SAFE sells the tickets at a discount on its website, and then mails the lift passes to customers within 48 hours of purchase. The nonprofit dedicates 100 percent of the proceeds to its initiatives, said Dawn Harris, development manager.

Read the whole story

Bad employees – fix or fire them?

By Ed Koch, Las Vegas Sun

The administrative assistant spent about as much time hanging around the water cooler complaining about her job and the workplace as she did half-heartedly completing her assigned duties.

“I wish they’d fire me so I can sit home and collect unemployment,” time and again she told co-workers, many of whom were fed up with her not pulling her weight.

It took less than two weeks for the company’s new human resources director, Mary Beth Hartleb, to conclude that, as employees go, the woman was broken and could not be fixed.

“She was thrilled to get her severance package,” said Hartleb,

a 30-year veteran in the field that used to be called personnel. “And, despite having to pay her more than we wanted to, the company benefited from her departure because soon after she left, office morale greatly improved, as did worker productivity.”

Perhaps most shocking about that story is that the secretary in question had lasted 10 years in that job. She survived a fistful of frustrated supervisors before anyone did anything to stem the toxicity she was spreading through her department.

“Unfortunately, many employers do not document each incident (of poor employee productivity or misconduct), as was the case here,” said Hartleb, owner of Prism Global Management Group LLC of Henderson, which runs human resources operations for about 30 companies that collectively employ more than 5,000 people.

Read the whole story

Study: Teen e-cigarette use rising

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON — A new federal survey has found that e-cigarette use among teenagers has surpassed the use of traditional cigarettes as smoking has continued to decline. Health advocates say the trend for e-cigarette use is dangerous because it is making smoking seem normal again. They also worry it could lead to an increase in tobacco smoking, though the new data do not show that.

The survey, released Tuesday by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, measured drug and alcohol use this year among middle and high school students across the country. More than 41,000 students from 377 public and private schools participated. It is one of several such national surveys, and the most up-to-date.

It was the first time this survey measured e-cigarette use, so there were no comparative data on the change over time. Other surveys have shown e-cigarette use among middle and high school students to be much lower, but increasing fast.

Read the whole story