

Road Beat: Toyota Prius Prime has a kick



Toyota Prius Prime is one of the best hybrids on the market.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

As most of you know I am not a big fan of electric vehicles. They are expensive to build and have limited utility creating range anxiety. If Tesla didn't have government and utility subsidies of about 25 percent of the purchase price, they would have folded long ago. Even though their stock is over \$300 a share and their market cap is equal to Ford's, they have yet to turn a real profit and that's with receiving \$1 billion in government subsidies directly and indirectly in the last five or six years. Over the last five years, losses totaled about \$2 billion, including the income from subsidies.

And that's not counting discounted electrical rates to the purchaser, another subsidy.

But the Prius Prime is a different animal. You will never run out of electrons because of its 1.8L 95 hp (at 5,200 rpm) four-cylinder engine tucked under the hood that meshes perfectly using a CVT transmission with its two-electric motor/generators of 31 and 71 hp, respectively. But the maximum combined hp is limited to a total of 121 hp which will not exactly create escape velocity.

Outside the Prime looks right out of the Jetsons. To call it beautiful would be an overstatement, but if you want to be recognized as driving a plug-in hybrid, saving the world, then this is your ride. From the rear, it somewhat reminds me of a 1959 Chevy with its aircraft carrier flight deck. While it may not look sleek with its big, busy front end, its co-efficient of drag is a minimal 0.25. While a compact car in size (183L x 70W x 58H inches), inside dimensions are mid-size.

Electricity is provided by about a five to six-hour charge from 120-volt household GFI circuit which provides about 6 kWh of energy to the 8.8 kWh L-I battery. The reason is that the Prime only can use about 6 kWh of its battery energy before it morphs into a regular hybrid, like a standard Prius. But even with half of its total energy remaining and in EV mode, if you go full throttle at about 50 mph while running pure EV, the engine lights off to add some more fuel to the fire.



Specifications

Price \$27,965 to about \$36,000

Engine and motors

Gasoline: 1.8L Inline four cylinder DOHC, 16 valve 95 hp @ 5,200 rpm

105 lb.-ft. of torque @ 3,600 rpm

Electric Two motor/generators 31 hp and 30 lb.-ft. of torque and 71 hp and 120 lb.-ft. of torque
Battery 8.8 kWh Lithium-ion, 265 pounds

Transmission

Continuously Variable

Configuration

Transverse front engine and motors/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 182.9 inches

Width 69.3 inches

Height 57.9 inches

Track (f/r) 60.2/60.6 inches

Ground clearance 4.8 inches

Fuel Capacity 11.3 gallons

Passenger volume 91.5 cubic feet

Cargo volume 19.8 cubic feet

Weight 3,375 pounds

Wheels 15X6.5-inch alloy

Tires 195/65X15

Turning circle 33.4 feet

Coefficient of drag 0.25

Performance

0-60 mph 9.71 seconds
50-70 mph 5.38 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 10.20 seconds
Top speed Estimated at 115 mph
Fuel economy for the first 22-25 miles its infinite, in hybrid EPA rated at 55/53/54 mpg city/highway/combined. In suburban driving expect 60-65 mpg and on the highway (level) at legal speeds 57 mpg.

With a full charge in pure EV, it was able to easily run 24-25 miles pure electric. You can see from my pictures how many days I averaged 199.9 mpg even driving more than 25 miles as I recharged in between drives and most of these drives were in 10-12 mile stages at 50 mph plus with little stop and go and up and down some 3-4 percent grades.

As to performance, the Prime in hybrid mode which you can do even with a full charge and save the battery for later, the Prime averaged 9.71 seconds in 0-60 mph runs which is very comparable to a regular Prius. Passing times in hybrid mode from 50-70 mph was 5.38 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade lengthened that time to 10.20 seconds, again very comparable to the current Prius. In pure EV all those times expand by about a second. The CVT has a gear called "B" and it really does a nice job of recharging the battery and controlling speed in a long downgrade. I used it extensively in controlling speed down the nine-mile Spooner Summit.

But here is the deal, it feels spunkier than those times reveal, even when pure electric. In normal or even somewhat aggressive driving the Prime will surprise you, especially

from 10-50 mph. Yeah, sure there isn't much left after 70-75 mph, but the Prime is not about racing and if you compare it to the sedans of the 1970s or earlier, the Prius rocks pretty good.

But buying a Prius Prime is about minimizing gasoline energy use which it does admirably. It's easy to achieve 4 miles out of every kilowatt hour of energy which costs on average in the United States about 13-14 cents a kWh or about 3.5 cents a mile for the energy costs. And it will return about 22-25 miles on a full charge without ever lighting off the gas engine. I made several 24 mile round trips where to computer shows a fuel economy of 199.9 mpg, meaning you used no gas. I did not use the A/C during the entire test.

In a climb over the Sierra to Carson City, I started with a full charge and depleted the energy allowed until hybrid mode kicks at about 18 miles, but had climbed in elevation about 1,200 feet up Highway 50. The 210-mile round trip averaged an astounding 66 mpg and no plug-in charging was done during the trip. But I did pick up enough energy from the downhill into Carson City to spend 10-12 miles around Carson City on pure EV.

Hybrid highway full economy is just a bit better than the EPA data which indicates fuel economy numbers of 55/53/54 mpg city/highway/combined. At 70 mph, the Prime in hybrid mode averaged 57 mpg in two, two way runs. Prime will cruise at 70 mph in EV mode as well, but in about 20 minutes the hybrid will automatically kick in. Overall fuel economy exceeded 60 mpg.

Handling will surprise most drivers as it could be called nimble. Sure, standard rubber is tall and comparatively skinny 195/65X15 tires, but it has fully independent suspension. And while certainly not a Mini-Cooper, it acquitted itself well when pushed in the twisties. As "Dirty Harry" said, "A man got's to know his limitations." Ditto for the Prime. It

certainly exceeded my expectations and what I thought its limitations would be.

Prime rides superb. It is a supple well controlled ride best demonstrated when leaving a driveway that had 45 degree angled four inch curbs as it absorbed the bump better than most every vehicle ever tested and equaling the best such as a Lexus RX450h. It's a bit cushy, but I doubt any Prime buyer will take his car to the race track or ever participate in a traffic light grand prix. Prime buyers are interested in comfort, quiet and technology. At 70 mph in pure EV there is no engine rpm and even in hybrid mode, it's so quiet, no one cares what the rpm is as it will always pull down 55 mpg or better. While wind and engine noise are well subdued, tire noise can be an issue and on coarser roads it was an issue. Maybe it is the low rolling resistance tires. I'll take one mpg less fuel economy and quieter tires.

As a leader in technology, Prime has all the safety features and four-wheel disc brakes with every acronym. Headlights were excellent.

Inside is a Toyota quality interior with top quality materials. The comfortable seats were done in Toyota's quality SofTex leather like material and were quite comfortable. Rear seating is also decent. But the focal point of the Prime interior is the 12-inch (ok, so it's really 11.6 inches, but it's still big) info screen for GPS, climate control (interior climate as we can't control the exterior climate although the Prime is a great example of adaptation) and the media/sound system. It is a touch screen which is not my favorite as I still prefer buttons and knobs for the accuracy and more positive feel.

Instead of a conventional binnacle in front of the steering wheel it uses a centered dash which uses letters and digits that are too small, but the info that is accessible is amazing, not just fuel economy, but miles per kWh, daily

driving fuel economy, a driver's rating system for economical driving and so much more. It is quite the "entertainment system."

Pricing for this line of plug in hybrids starts at \$27,100 for the Prius Prime Plus, \$28,800 for the Prius Prime Premium and \$33,100 for the Prius Prime Advanced. Considering the alliterations, I am surprised its name isn't the Prius Prime Phantastic. Add to all those numbers \$865 for the boat ride from Aichi, Japan. But here is the deal with EVs and plug-in EVs (PHEV), is the price of the car artificially low. At the sticker price, is Toyota making an appropriate profit as they do on their conventional cars? While Toyota won't tell us, it is important to know as at the sticker price this technology makes lots of dollars and sense. But if the price is artificially low then two things. In your own self-interest, the Prime becomes a great buy, but as to the industry itself, the Prime becomes an expensive exercise for the rest of us. Without government mandates, would the Prime have ever been built?

But here's the deal. Prime is a very comfortable, go anywhere car. It achieves incredible fuel economy. It performs nicely. And it's priced to be affordable. Who cares if Toyota is losing money on every car, although we don't know that. Sure, it's different looking, but Toyota hybrid buyers want that "exclusivity." And if you live within 12 miles of your work, you won't use any gas (you might want to use Stabil in your tank to keep it from going bad), or if you can plug in for 5-6 hours on a 110V or half that time on a 220V receptacle, you can go about 25 miles one way. Now here is the kicker. Many utility companies will subsidize your electric bill for your car and your cost per mile will be 2-3 cents a mile.

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.

Grief support groups available in S. Lake Tahoe

Support is available on the South Shore for people who have lost a loved one.

Barton Hospice office a grief support group the first and third Thursday of each month from noon-1:3pm at 2092 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Suite 500, South Lake Tahoe.

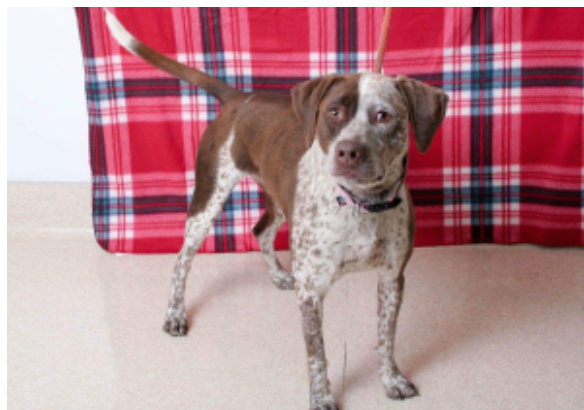
Barton Hospice encourages people who have experienced the loss of a loved one or have endured a significant, life-altering event to attend the ongoing bereavement group called Reflections of Life and Loss. This group helps teach attendees how to cope with certain situations and encourages emotional connections with others.

For questions or more information, call Tina Bruess at 530.543.5592 or Barton Hospice at 530.543.5581.

The survivors of suicide loss support group meets the fourth Thursday of each month from 6-7pm at Barton Public Relations Office, 2092 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Suite 400, South Lake Tahoe.

Anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide are welcome to attend this monthly support group.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Roxy

Roxy is a beautiful 2-year-old German Shorthair Pointer, probably mixed with Labrador. She has lots of energy and if she is not exercised enough, she will jump fences.

She cannot go home with cats and she can be choosy about her female dog friends.

Rosy is spayed, microchipped, tested for heart worm, 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** or call the animal shelter. Vouchers are available there also. Bring \$25 and a copy of a photo ID and a local utility bill.

– Karen Kuentz

‘Alice in Wonderland’ actors being sought

Tahoe Arts Project will be bringing the Missoula Children’s Theater back to Tahoe the week of July 10-14.

Auditions for “Alice in Wonderland” will be July 10 at the South Tahoe Middle School multipurpose room from 10am-noon. Plan to stay for the full two hours.

Some of the cast members will be asked to stay for a rehearsal immediately following the audition.

Among the roles to be cast are three Alices of varying size, her sister Margaret, the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, the Queen of Hearts, the King of Hearts, the Knave of Hearts, the Cheshire Cats, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, the Flower Band, Cards and Lobsters.

No advance preparation is necessary.

Assistant directors will also be cast to aid in rehearsals throughout the week and to take on essential backstage responsibilities. All students, entering 1-12 grades are welcome. Must be 5 and have completed kindergarten to participate. There is no guarantee that everyone who auditions will be cast in the play.

Auditions are free. If cast, there will be a fee of \$50 per child to participate in this weeklong theater program. A limited number of scholarships are available; call Tahoe Arts Project at 530.542.3632.

Rehearsals will be from 10am to 2:30pm each day.

Alice in Wonderland will be presented on July 14 at STMS at 3pm and 5pm. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children and seniors.

How to buy pot legally in Nevada

By Jenny Kane, Reno Gazette-Journal

While it may not be your first time buying pot, it may be your first time doing so legally.

As of today, recreational marijuana will be available in select dispensaries in Northern and Southern Nevada, and an expected green rush is expected to follow.

While the Nevada Department of Taxation has yet to release a list of dispensaries licensed to sell recreational marijuana during the early start program, we spoke with one of the co-owners of Mynt, Joey Gilbert, about what you may need to know if you stop at a pot shop.

Read the whole story

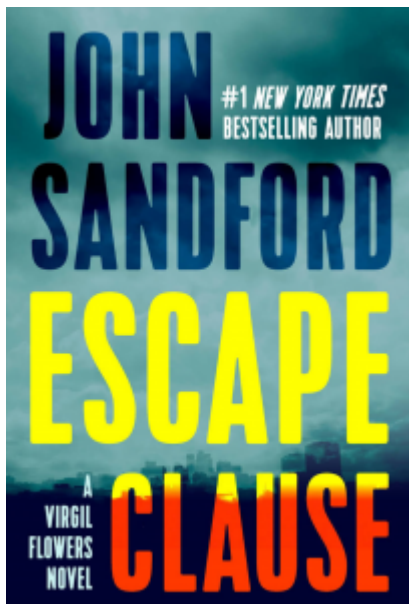
Book review: 'Escape Clause'

difficult to finish

By Kathryn Reed

My book club friends say John Sandford is a great read at the beach – fast, easy and not intellectual. That sounds perfect to me.

The problem, though, is one of his latest books, “Escape Clause” (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2016), is really bad. So bad that it seemed like torture “having” to read it. I was so slow I didn’t get it done in time for our meeting.



Still, I went to the gathering last week just to hear what others had to say. I had to know if I was the only one who found few redeeming qualities in this book. I was not alone – in fact, I was in the majority.

It’s hard to say if the story or writing was worse. Both left a lot to be desired.

It was good to hear that Sandford’s other Virgil Flowers novels are much better. I’m wary, though. I doubt I will give him another shot even though others raved about his previous works.

The two tigers being stolen from a zoo with the intent to kill them and use their body parts for medicinal purposes was intriguing. It generated a lot of discussion in my book club. This was a good premise, but not well developed.

Some of the book clubbers said they didn't like the main character, Virgil Flowers, as much in this book, or the woman he was hooked up with. Flowers is a cop for the state of Minnesota.

I don't have a problem with non-intellectual books, but I do want to be entertained.

I think I'll look for another author for my beach reading.

USFS fire guru retires after 38 years



Kit Bailey has been the face and voice of all things fire for LTBMU for years. Photo/LTN file

By Kit Bailey

After 38 years, I can retire knowing I've been a part of change and growth in the wildland fire community.

Starting out as a seasonal firefighter for California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and working my way up in the Forest Service, I set out to become a forest fire management officer within California, fulfilling that goal 15 years ago by accepting the position here in the Lake Tahoe Basin. This job, my time as a smokejumper, and then serving as a Type I operations chief have been some my greatest career successes.

Today, on my last day, I know it's time to pass the torch to the professionals we've brought up.

Over the years, I've traveled to incidents across the nation, getting the opportunity to work alongside some amazing people on difficult and dangerous wildfires. My greatest appreciation is for the efforts done by the firefighters on the ground. Even when we work to get it right, people can still get hurt in this job. By ensuring they have necessary equipment, solid direction, and are performing their duties safely, I have put them first in every decision, every situation.

To this day, I've taken the duty of guardian and defender of the Lake Tahoe Basin very seriously. I have tremendous respect and appreciation for the chiefs and fire agencies around the lake. Our time together has created a strong bond of trust and protection we feel for the other, and know we will support when called. Success is truly about those relationships and collaboration with the fire, land management and regulatory agencies. When I got here, we all had areas to improve on, but we've come a long way and are now a national model for

coordination and cooperation.

My wife, Shelly, son, Carson, and daughter, Josie, have graciously supported me through all of this. I couldn't have had the career I have with the Forest Service without them and their understanding, selflessness and sacrifice.

Though I am retiring from the Forest Service, I will continue to serve the Tahoe basin in a new role, protecting the communities in and around California for years to come.

Kit Bailey retired June 30 as the fire chief for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.

Brace for congestion in Incline Village

The following traffic and parking controls are planned for July 1-4 in the Incline Village area.

Road closures for Saturday's parade:

Highway 28 will be closed from just east of the Mt. Rose Highway roundabout to Country Club Drive from 8:30am-noon.

Parking restrictions:

There will be no parking on Village Boulevard (Southwood Boulevard to Lakeshore Boulevard) and Lakeshore Boulevard (Village to Country Club) beginning from July 1-4. There will be limited handicap parking available on Lakeshore Boulevard in front of Incline Beach gate.

Road closures July 4:

Lakeshore Boulevard will be closed on July 4 (between Village and Country Club) from 8pm until after the fireworks display.

There will be one-way traffic July 4 from 5am-11pm on Lakeshore Boulevard from Village Boulevard to Country Club Drive.

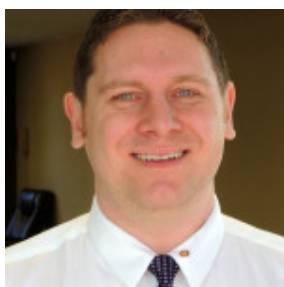
Bus:

Ride the free shuttle to the IVGID beaches. July 3-4 there will be extended hours from 10:30am-10:30pm. Must have valid beach access to use the shuttle service.

Money Matters: Don't go broke on vacation

By Nic Abelow

Everyone needs a vacation periodically. Breaking the routine of the workaday world is not only refreshing, but studies show it is good for you and your ability to do a better job. Reducing job stress can lead to more productivity.



Nic Abelow

It's easy to spend a lot of money on a vacation, but that guarantees neither a good time nor vacation value. With a

little planning, you can have a great time and still avoid breaking your budget.

Vacation value

Whether you find a vacation value or just a vacation depends, of course, on whether you find the kinds of places, activities, and people that meet your needs. For instance, a wonderful buy at Disneyland is little value to a couple who prefers to spend a week on the ski slopes.

Here are some tips to trim costs and get more value for your vacation dollar:

Plan ahead. You may get the kind of vacation you want at the time and place you want if you book your transportation and accommodations in advance. You'll also have time to put aside money to pay for the trip without using high-interest credit cards at the last minute.

Budget for your vacation spending. Figure out how much your vacation will cost, add in the fun extras, and then start saving so you don't run up a credit card bill. If you don't have ready cash, but you simply must get away to keep your sanity, check out getting a bank installment loan rather than using plastic. Interest charges will be lower, and the debt will be paid back in a set period of time rather than revolving on your credit card bill.

Book your flight in advance. The difference in airfare alone can amount to hundreds of dollars, especially when you purchase tickets 14 days in advance and you travel Tuesday through Thursday. Flight bargains like these are offered for limited time periods and tend to sell out early. You have to check with the airlines often or have a travel agent who watches out for you.

Buy your vacation cruise well in advance. Cruise-line owners want to make sure their ships are booked. The difference in price can be substantial between a purchase made in November

versus one made in January.

Selected Travel Resources

Trip booking. Look for “deals” and “discounts” pages on Hotwire, Travelocity, Kayak, Priceline

Short-term apartment and home rentals may offer better values than hotel rooms: HomeAway, AlluraDirect.

A good guide can help point you toward the best values: Lonely Planet, Rick Steves, Frommer's.

Travel packages. Some people want to wander on their own and are willing to pay for it. But a vacation package that includes airfare, hotel, and admissions to local attractions can be very attractive.

With hotel accommodations and vacation packages, you can often save with last-minute flexibility as there are frequently great vacation values available on short notice. You may be able to get last-minute specials – unsold seats on flights or accommodations at holiday resorts – for a discount.

Off-season, off-peak, and midweek values. Golfers can rent luxury suites in resorts such as Palm Springs, Scottsdale, and South Florida in the summer for a fraction of their winter prices. The first two weeks in December may also offer prices that are almost as good. Packed during ski season, resorts such as Aspen, Vail, and others offer lower-priced summer packages with activities ranging from whitewater rafting to bike and Jeep tours, horseback riding, and balloon rides. Contact the resort directly and make these reservations early because good deals go fast.

And think midweek and off-peak. You'll avoid crowds and save up to 50 percent. The Caribbean islands are beautiful year-round, but a week's stay on St. Thomas in November or June costs considerably less than a week in February. In addition to the money saved off-season, there are fewer tourists in

town, leaving more room in the duty-free shops and on the beaches. Dates for the high season vary by location, so check with your travel agent or resort website.

Take advantage of discounts. If you're a member of a fraternal or special-interest group, you can often save 10 percent or more on the cost of expenses such as car rentals and hotel accommodations.

Cash in on the competition among airlines by watching out for airline advertisements urging you to take advantage of drastically reduced promotional fares. These offers may require advance purchase, allowing you time to plan a vacation around the best value offered. Also be sure to check major airline websites, which often offer additional discounts on advertised discount fares and have web-only specials.

Be aware that you can be charged more if the airline fare goes up after you make your reservation. Therefore, it's advisable that you pay for the tickets as soon as possible to lock in the fare.

By the way, airlines don't have to give you a refund if the fare drops after you've bought tickets, although some will do so. Keep on the lookout for lowered fares, and request a refund or credit voucher if your fare drops.

Distance can save you money. You don't have to be right near an attraction to enjoy it.

Skiers can save substantially on lodging by staying farther away from a mountain resort rather than within walking distance of the lifts. If you must stay on the mountain, know that midweek rates are generally lower than weekend rates. The same is true for popular vacation attractions like Disneyland: lodging outside rather than inside the park can result in savings.

Sometimes the lower-cost approach, however, may not give you

the most value. Renting a condo at a ski resort may be more expensive than staying in an off-attraction hotel, but when you balance the price against the costs of a rental car, the time spent driving, and the inconvenience – especially if you're traveling with children – it may be a better choice. The bottom line is that a little advance planning can go a long way in making your vacation a fun-filled – and affordable – experience.

Nic Abelow is a LPL financial advisor with Abelow, Pratt & Associates Financial Advisors and Wealth Management in Lake Tahoe.

Alert Placer deputy saves 6 Tahoe ducklings



Six Tahoe ducklings have a new lease on life.
Photo/PCSO

Six ducklings tried to run from the law, but officers were able to apprehend them in Tahoe City.

A Placer County sheriff's deputy saw the group of orphaned

ducklings crossing North Lake Boulevard. She used her patrol vehicle to block traffic, allowing them to safely cross.

The ducklings huddled up under a vehicle on the side of the highway. The deputy stood guard to make sure they didn't go anywhere until animal services arrived.

But animal services came unprepared. The ducklings were able to avoid their large net. But what they didn't know is they were waddling right into a sewer drain.

This time animal control got it right. The drain cover was removed and with a smaller net the animals were plucked from this very unnatural environment.

The six ducklings were to be taken to a wildlife rescue, with the hopes they learn to survive without their mom.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report