

## Living With – the Toyota Corolla 2.0l Diesel

Weeks 11-12

### Reluctant Return

If it was not for some efficient person at Toyota who noticed that their Corolla Diesel was missing in action I would still be parking it in my garage. Isn't there as saying that goes along the lines of "Possession is 9/10's of the law"? I wonder if they would just "lose" the Corolla in the books somewhere..." Nice Try.

So looking back on the last three months of driving I have to say that it has met all expectations and some.

Even the aesthetics of the gearshift and handbrake positioning, which, when I first saw it had me thinking not my cup of tea, yet now I do not even think of it.

What was difficult about reporting back on the Corolla Diesel was how much was I writing about Diesel versus how much I was writing about Corolla? To try and split two elements apart I did a sneak drive of the petrol version as a comparison and yes there are some differences in the two, yet personally I prefer the diesel with its manual gear box and more fuel efficient engine. The conclusion I drew is that you cannot really separate the two aspects.

In one of the earlier Living With articles we promised we would return to the fuel economy of the Corolla. We travelled a total distance of 3200km. In that time we have driven it the car has done 2 road trips, a number of trips over the Waitakere's to Piha beach and a host of shopping trips and family taxi journeys. As you would expect with any vehicle the type of journey will impact the fuel economy of your car, but we believe that we have driven a fair representation of what a mid size hatch would drive.

At times we managed to achieve the Toyota's figure of 5.4 litres per 100km, but overall the average was near 6.2 litres per 100km. To be fair the hill climbs to and from Piha contributed somewhat to this, but the worst offender was the traffic congestion on the roads. Even though when you idle in traffic and consume only 1 litre per 100km while doing so, it soon adds up. To prove the point, an uninterrupted run to work took about 37 minutes with a fuel consumption of 5.6 litres per 100km, however a peak traffic run took 58 minutes and the fuel consumption jumped up to 6.4 litres per 100 km.

So what does Toyota Corolla provide? It provides a brand name that is synonymous with reliability and mass appeal – both in the business and private sector. I have come to think of Toyota as being the more modern version of the VW Beetle - the people's wagon and when you read articles where captains of industry referring to their products as being Toyota Like - not a flash top end performance machine, but being a straight forward easy to operate, reliable and trustworthy product then you know you have made it.

Combining that philosophy with a diesel engine Toyota have just made it all the better.

Finally, as I hand the keys back, thanks again to Toyota NZ for allowing us to **Live With** their Toyota Corolla Diesel.

## It's The Small Things That Count

As we all know schools are back, roads are becoming congested at 8am in the morning (at least in the cities) and the family taxi rules supreme. Having shipped kids about for the last week a few comments came my way from my chauffeured teenage boys one of whom would dearly love to have a drive of the Toyota so he can practice his manual driving. After all, according to him, it's my fault that he can only drive an automatic... It seems to be a teenage status thing to be able to drive a manual – go figure.

When a new car makes its way into a family garage, we “ooh and ah”, comment on the colour and upholstery, but only after driving it for awhile do we get to appreciate the smaller, yet equally important, design features. So through this process what observations did the family make? Note; most of these are from the passengers not the driver.

- Sunglass holder in the roof can hold not 1 but 2 pairs of sunglasses.
- Seatbelt alarm – laptop feels very important and I feel very silly for not belting it in, so that chime began making its painfully annoying noise once again.
- Okay I should put the laptop either on the floor or in the boot.
- Big buttons for lights in the cabin (situated by rear vision) means the fiddling up by the rear vision mirror is virtually eliminated. In fact all the buttons are a good size and easy to locate, which minimises driver distractions
- The recessed tray on the dashboard with its knurled surface not only provided extra storage but the design meant that no items placed there ever slid out or off the dash onto the floor.
- There is good leg room in the rear seats for both lads, one of whom is over the 6' mark
- There is plenty of room in the boot for school bags and sports gear (and laptops!)
- Being long on pocket and short on arm meant buying a roof rack for carrying the surfboard out to the beach an unlikely happening, which in turn means a regular putting down and up of the rear seats. In some vehicles this is a job a half, however with the Corolla it is very easy
- Compared to similar sized cars the young lads surfboard fits in without sticking too far through between the front seats. FYI it's a 6'2" board
- The aircon in the Corolla is excellent. Auckland suffered about 95% humidity the other day and the relief by all once they got in the car was out of this world. Only problem was trying to get them out at the other end. “Can we go round the block again Dad?”
- Now there was one criticism from the 14 year old – the car stereo was not loud enough. As for the parent, my view was the totally the opposite – I actually like to be able to hear emergency service vehicle sirens and screeching brakes of cars around me. Driving is not just about the visual sense, hearing what's going on around you is equally important. So seeing as I am bigger than him (just), my view is the one that counts.

So all in all an ideal around town family taxi that easily passed the critical eye of the non driving users of the Corolla.

## Winning A Westie

A couple of days ago I was picking up my wife from our local garage where our own car had been serviced. Arriving in the Toyota Corolla Diesel definitely perked up interest. The owner of the workshop has been servicing our cars since 1988, and in fact servicing our extended families cars since Mk1 Escorts were new to the roads. In those days his Dad ran the workshop. So over the last couple of years he has seen me drive up in a variety of makes and models. The workshop owner is a Westie, loves his V8's and of course his company vehicle is a fair dinkum Aussie ute. Also he is right into rebuilding cars and racing them. I could also mention the love of fishing but I think you already have an idea as to what he is like.

When we were looking to buy a 2nd hand car second car we asked him what we should look at. His answer at the time was Toyota. We bought one at the time and he was bang on the money. It was reliable, easy to drive, safe and in relative terms cheap to maintain. No regrets from us whatsoever. So when I drove up in a brand new Toyota of course I saw a huge smile on his face, which upon my telling him it was a diesel raised an increased level of interest which saw us discussing the pro's and cons of diesel and Toyota at the same time.

We went through the usual questions like; is it noisy, what's the power/ acceleration like? Well on both counts of course I could provide a categorical pass mark. The discussion then went onto how common rail diesel technology has made a huge difference to how diesel vehicles perform. As he put it, it has changed his view on diesel engines totally. Now here is a Westie mechanic espousing the benefits of diesel power. Of course we did discuss the, er...quality of NZ diesel –the fuel – and the impact of RUC on the price of diesel and if the NZ government is serious in supporting energy efficiency then perhaps they should tax diesel as they tax petrol.

I couldn't resist offering a drive around the block in the Corolla. So off we went, through a small set of shops and as we went I turned the radio volume right down. He couldn't believe how quiet the diesel engine was. The comment was if the radio is on you don't even notice the engine in 1st gear and the NZ chip seal puts more road noise through the car than the engine does. Pass mark here I reckon. Then with a bit of clear road it was time to bury the boot. The surprise and then smile on his face at about this point it was priceless. Gear shifts were smooth, pass mark all round. The last comment was "I could happily drive one of these as my own."

The key element in winning this Westie over was that the essential car was a standard reliable and easy to maintain Toyota Corolla with all the benefits that come with that, meshed with modern diesel technology – The Best of Both Worlds.

Oh, a last note from the Westie workshop. One of the other mechanics also took it for a quick drive around the block and is now wondering whether he should be persuading his wife to cancel the petrol powered Toyota Corolla that they ordered for the diesel version...

Times, they are a changing.

## **Almost Caught Out!**

Let's just say that I have been getting very used to looking at the fuel gauge for days on end and not seeing any need to fund another branch of the governments' tax revenue; translation the fuel pump.

We drove the Toyota Corolla over the Christmas break in and around town out to the beaches a number of times and it certainly feels like my bank account is winning out. It looks like the fuel economy over time is good – if not excellent, at the end of the Living with period we'll let you know just how good. Meanwhile...

This tale is how I (the royal we here, as the other half also drives the car) almost got caught out when the warning "chime" let me know that I was low on fuel. I had been lulled into a false sense of security by the fact that the need to refill the Toyota Corolla diesel is probably only about half as often for a petrol equivalent, so another quick trip to the West Coast beaches should be a breeze.

When the warning emanated from somewhere in the dash my son and I were  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way to the beach where, naturally, there is no fuel pump within about 30 minutes. Decision time; do I or don't I turn around to find fuel or not? Now being male, reading manuals or seeking directions are strange concepts, so my belief was that we had enough (what does the 'E' stand for? Enough...) to get to the beach and then to the gas station on the return journey.

We had just peeked the beach over the hills and saw the fantastic surf and the decision was made for us, on we went. Admittedly at a more gentle rate and the long winding downhill to the beach gave my conscience a bit of a break. My son asked what happens if we run out of fuel on the way home, to which I replied, "Well I guess you will have to push the car to the nearest fuel station then." His expression showed that he was not sold on the idea. My calculations plus the onboard fuel computer and my recent driving habits gave me about 10km spare on the return trip.

We spent the morning on the beach and thoroughly enjoyed the surf, the fresh coffee from the local store and then it was time to head home. So immediately it was the climb up the hills away from the beach and once we made the top I checked the distance calculator again 35km remaining. Mmmmm, okay allow for the uphill section we just had, use the gears, keep the revs down and onward. The next time I checked it was 24km remaining and I was sure that I had not travelled 11km.

My son was looking on with a small sign of panic starting to show on his face. "Not a problem, we will get there with heaps to spare and remember the last kilometre or so to the fuel station is downhill so you won't have to push me that much." said I. Again that teenage look of disdain appeared. The distance to go display counted down from 16km, to 14km, to 11km and then with a mere 8km remaining we arrived at the gas station. Smug doesn't describe the look on my face – while the inside was offering up thanks to the gods of fuel economy.

As I started to put diesel into the Corolla, the fuel pump cut out and the attendant came rushing out to tell me I was putting diesel into a petrol car. I was able to inform her that the car was actually diesel powered so don't panic and thanks very much for her concern. Now how often are attendants this observant?

We then began to have a conversation about diesel versus petrol and the Corolla's performance, which I made clear that I was more than happy with the economy.

What became clear from this conversation was that people are just getting their heads around the diesel car concept, helped by manufacturers like Toyota introducing diesel powered cars.

The attendant was both impressed and surprised by the Corolla diesel, commenting that diesel does give a greater choice and that gas stations need to be geared up for seeing what they perceive as traditional petrol cars using diesel fuel.

I hadn't thought of it that way, but it does mean change is on the way on our 'roadscape' and that manufacturers, like Toyota, are helping change public perception... as well as making sure that people like me can make the gas station with fumes to spare!

## **Where Annoying Is What You Want.**

How can you forget the scene in the movie Shrek where Donkey annoys everyone by asking "Are we there yet, are we there yet?"

Did that annoy you? It did me, and brought back memories of being a young kid in the back of the car as my family ventured out and about, interestingly enough in an 80's Toyota Corona 2.0l. Scary thoughts of youth – young kids, fashions and hairstyles...

So what has all this to do with the 2008 Corolla 2.0l Diesel? I drove the Corolla from home a couple of days ago to go and do some Christmas shopping, stopping at the Post Box to post a few Christmas Cards. Nothing odd there, however, to my shame I, like so many other people, elected to not put on the seatbelt to drive the 400m. Dumb idea! Not only from a legal point of view but also because of that wonderfully wretched chime that emanated from somewhere within the vehicle that at first I could live with, but if you leave the belt unbuckled long enough the annoying chime repeats more frequently. And gets louder.

I surrender! The seatbelt gets fastened restoring peace to the passenger compartment. I am once again driving in a legal condition and what's more I am in a safer state than what I was a few seconds prior. So as an incentive to 'Belt Up' the chimes were a total success. Well done Toyota!

## **Product Development - a suggestion**

Now we have heard how certain sounds and or music have been used as torture in certain prison facilities around the world and certain music is being used to deter

younger Kiwi's from hanging around shopping centres i.e. Barry Manilow/.

Perhaps Toyota may want to develop the chimes concept further where if drivers and / or passengers do not fasten seatbelts then Barry and friends could start singing out to us through the speaker system. Just a thought.

Have a wonderful Christmas and we will be back with you in the New Year with a few more tales of Living With the Toyota Corolla 2.0l Diesel

## **Something new to drive...**

Toyota has kindly provided us with a Diesel variant of the very successful Toyota Corolla (it is New Zealand's, and the world's, leading selling mid-size car) to 'live with' for 12 weeks. The idea is to not only get a feel of what the vehicle is like and capable of, but to have the opportunity use it as a family car.

We'll discover how it handles on the regular family 'taxi' journeys in and around Auckland, but also on longer trips, plus the inevitable beach run to Piha for the surfing-mad younger son. The 14 year old is not driving himself there quite yet. There will be occasions when the vehicle has only one person in it, i.e. the typical urban commute including shopping trips, to having two up, right through to having four or five of us in the car.

All in all we should get a real sense of what this vehicle has to offer. Apart from the D4D\* badging on the front left and right panels of the car, on the outside it looks no different to the petrol version. It is only the manual gear shift and the distinctive diesel rattle that you hear on start up that gives it away. For those who still believe diesels go bang-rattle-thump, I can tell you it really is only a rattle these days and this is only at idle and very low speeds.

If you want a diesel version of the Corolla there is only the manual version - a bit like Henry Ford's Model T colour selection I guess. In truth it is more to do with the fact that it is well known that manual vehicles are more fuel efficient than their automatic counterparts and it is this that Toyota are targeting.

Being raised in the age when manual gearboxes were the norm and "Tri-matic" (anyone recall the brand?) gearboxes was something new, I very quickly settled into using the manual gearbox. When first entering the Corolla I looked at the position of the gearshift, mounted on the curved centre console, and thought, 'nah not me'. However, once I settled into the drivers seat and started to play with the gearshift I found the positioning far more ergonomic than the traditional positioning of the gearshift. Aesthetically it doesn't do it for me. Others, on hearing I was driving a diesel Corolla, came and took a peek and liked the look of it. Gear selection is a breeze and with six forward gears to choose from. There is a gear pretty much for all ranges of use and provides a very smooth ride when moving up through the gears.

The sixth gear on the Corolla tends to not be needed until you are over 110km per hour if you believe the little gear selector light that shows up on your dash when the



vehicles' brain feels you are not driving the car to its optimum.

However, I still have the habit of listening to the engine plus watching the rev counter, and sixth gear can kick in quite nicely somewhere at or just below the 100km mark depending on road conditions. Initially, I found the little light annoying. However, one observer pointed out that for their teenager who was not taught to drive a manual car, the gear selector light is quite useful. Fair call, and after about a week I virtually do not see the gear selector light at all.

One of the features that I am thoroughly taken with is the requirement for the driver to have their foot on the clutch prior to being able to start. This is not strictly a Toyota feature but is an excellent safety feature to have. It will not stop you bunny-hopping on take-off if you let out the clutch in a rather hasty manner but it will prevent you starting the car in gear and possibly leaping the car forward into the front of the garage or possibly a pedestrian's legs as they walk past your supposedly parked car. I don't know statistically on how many occasions this may have happened. When talking to people who typically drive automatics, this safety feature is one that helps them get over the reluctance of driving a manual vehicle.

Well, that's the first **Living With** review of the Toyota Corolla 2.0l diesel. We will give you further insights and impressions as we use the vehicle over the next ten weeks. If you don't login again before Christmas, have a wonderful Christmas, drive safely, watch out for all the road works, take the extra time to reach your destinations, and thoroughly enjoy the Christmas holiday with your family and friends.

\* D4D is Toyota's branding of the direct injection, 4 stroke, common rail diesel which is designed to provide higher output power, better fuel economy, lower exhaust emissions and lower noise and vibration than conventional diesel engines.