

# AUTOMOTIVE

## Curbside

### 2010 Toyota Prius Keeps Me Moving Forward

By Anthony Barthel

The Toyota Prius has become an icon to represent all that is right with the hybrid car category. The unusual little hatchback is now in its third generation and continues to advance the category while also representing a huge chunk of its sales. Recently I had a chance to drive the third-generation Prius to see what the buzz was all about.

Even people who aren't that into cars almost immediately recognized this Prius as "the new one" and wanted to know what I thought of it. I have to commend Toyota for making the Prius stand out from the rest of the line in terms of styling - it doesn't look like any other Toyota model and that was smart. Had the Prius failed miserably, they could have blamed the styling. Since it has succeeded, the unique styling makes it an icon. Are we beginning to understand why Toyota is numero uno in car sales worldwide?

#### What's Hot

There's really only one way to test a car like the Prius. That would be in stop-and-go driving where a car like this has the most to offer. But that would be too logical. I took it to Thunderhill Raceway in Willows instead. The Prius does handle well, or at least it's respectable. While the tires are meant more to aid in good fuel economy than absolute cornering, they still did a commendable job around the track and offer all the gription you might need in any normal driving situation. In fact you might never take these tires to the limit based on some of the features in this particular Prius. For example, there was a lane departure feature that sounds an obnoxious beep and slightly nudges the steering wheel when you happen to get too close to the edge of the lane. This feature is probably a life saver to many Prius drivers who might be texting illegally and use it not to kill people on the sidewalk.

Another useful option was the radar cruise control that maintains both a safe speed and distance from the vehicle ahead when engaged. I love this because it makes using the cruise control useful and really can help you avoid tickets and potentially get better fuel economy. All hail radar cruise control - it's a terrific feature and works perfectly. It used to be plainly obvious when the gasoline engine kicked in in a Prius because it went from being a silent vehicle to a buzzy one. On this third-generation Prius it was barely detectable. This is a nice, smooth system and only extreme use of the gasoline engine makes it audible. There are other nice features, too, such as the Volvo-like center console that has space in a cubby below the radio for stuff like bluetooth phones and that.

#### What's Not

A couple of things bothered me about the new Prius, though. The whole car's "feel" was like a computer that's in need of replacing - sort of like your input at the DMV. It'll get attended to when they feel like it. From reaction to the accelerator pedal to the interface on the GPS, everything had a delayed feel to it. Frankly, if my computer were as slow to react as inputting of an address on the GPS I would seriously chuck the dumb thing. Today. My only other nit was the sun visor, which was from somewhere in the bargain basement.

#### In Summary

It's no secret that I'm not a fan of hybrids, period. But repeated comments from lots

and lots of readers about the excellent reliability of their first- and second-generation Priuses and better than expected battery life are beginning to change my mind. It's becoming obvious that the dire warnings about lousy battery life and poor reliability aren't the case. I do really like the form factor of the Prius and the overall design. I think Toyota made a brilliant move with this car which is paying off. And, I will be the first to admit that a hybrid is an outstanding choice for anyone who spends a lot of time in stop-and-go traffic. Other than a slow interface for the GPS (almost typical of all in-car GPS systems) and cheap sun visors, I think the Prius is a home.

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