

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2008 Toyota Avalon 4-DR LTD Sedan

Uncomplicated luxury and driving pleasure

BY KATHLEEN CARR

The Avalon has been reclassified from a full-size sedan to midsize in the premium class, even though the exterior and interior dimensions are identical to last year's model. Well known for its comfortable, smooth and quiet ride, the performance quality has been enhanced with a new six-speed transmission and improved brakes. For 2008, there are four models available: XL, Touring, XLS and Limited trim levels.

While there are some cosmetic changes for 2008, the sleek, uncomplicated exterior remains. Adding to a more contemporary look of the four-door sedan, the front bumper has a new, edgier look; the radiator grille and headlights have been updated, and the new smoke-colored taillamps add distinction.

Our test model, the highest trim level, the Limited, adds puddle lamps and has turn signals in the side

mirrors — in the glass itself, not on the housing. The Limited model also has chrome outside door handles.

Top honors should be awarded to the designers, who have done an outstanding job to provide all the amenities a driver or passenger may require in a pleasing, ergonomic environment.

For 2008 all models get a leather shifter, more chrome trim and a multi-information display. An eight-way power driver's seat is standard, and the Limited adds 10-way adjustment. The XLS and Limited have new, darker simulated wood trim for 2008.

Standard equipment includes a tilt/telescoping steering wheel, a sliding center armrest and a six-CD stereo with an MP3-player input jack, which replaces a CD/cassette unit. The three-passenger backseat has reclining backrests.

The Limited adds heated and ventilated front seats with a cushion length adjustment for the driver, as well as rain-sensing wipers and keyless start. The acoustic windshield is designed to block noise.



Specifications: 3.5-Liter 24-valve 268-hp @ 248 lb-ft. torque Dual Vt-1 engine; 6-Speed ECT-i automatic sequential shift transmission; 19-City, 28-Highway MPG; \$39,547. MSRP

Bluetooth connectivity is now included in the standard JBL premium stereo, which is optional on the Touring and XLS. The Limited can be fitted with adaptive cruise control that maintains a following distance to the car ahead and a navigation system.

Avalon's Smart Key System automatically lights up the door

with puddle lamps, allowing the driver to open the door with a touch on the handle and, once inside, start the engine with a pushbutton. This convenient safety system only unlocks the driver's side door, and can also activate the trunk. A single-blade rain-sensing windshield wiper is another smart feature. Latest in headlamp technology are

High Intensity Discharge (HID) headlamps, which provide brighter, broad-range visibility.

The Avalon scores Good in the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's frontal-offset and side-impact crash tests. All-disc antilock brakes with electronic brake-force distribution, side-impact airbags and a driver's knee airbag are stan-

dard. Side curtain airbags protect front and rear occupants, and an electronic stability system is optional on all trim levels.

Standard in the Limited and all Avalon models is a 3.5-liter 24-valve DOHC engine with Variable Valve Timing w/intelligence (VVT-i), which provides lower emissions and higher fuel efficiency. This powerful V6 with 268 horsepower and 248 lb.-ft. of torque makes highway driving a breeze. The Avalon will accelerate from 0-60 mph in about seven seconds.

This year the Avalon has a new six-speed automatic Electronically Controlled Transmission with intelligence (ECT-i), which is designed to "provide a sequential manual shift feature for a more involved driving experience," according to Toyota. Braking is improved thanks to larger rear discs and aluminum rear calipers. Aluminum alloy 17-inch wheels and P215/55R17 Michelin Energy tires were designed for improved handling exclusively for the Limited and Touring class.

Driving the Toyota Avalon is enjoyable because of its combination of handling, horsepower and torque. Time spent behind the wheel is easygoing and non-taxing, especially with its uncomplicated level of luxury.

Hoops for Obama

(AP) — Craig Robinson participated in his first campaign event for brother-in-law Barack Obama since becoming Oregon State's basketball coach — a three-on-three "Hoops for Change" event at Seattle Enhancement, Inc., the youth educational center in north Portland.

Robinson, hired by the Beavers on April 7, refereed Monday's game. Portland Trail Blazers James Jones and Channing Frye served as coaches and team analyst Antonio Harvey provided the play-by-play.

The event was designed to boost voter registration.

Robinson is the older brother



Oregon State's new basketball coach Craig Robinson, the brother-in-law of presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., referees a basketball game at "Hoops for Change" event.

First Black Division I Coach Dies at 96

(AP) — Will Robinson, the first black basketball coach at a Division I school and a Detroit Pistons scout who discovered Joe Dumars and Dennis Rodman, died Monday at a Detroit hospital. He was 96.

Robinson broke a racial barrier in the 1970s when he coached Illinois State. He joined the Pistons as a scout in 1976, and the additions of Dumars and Rodman were keys to Detroit's 1989 and 1990 NBA championships.

"Will Robinson was truly a legend and will be missed dearly," Dumars said. "He was a huge inspiration for me and so many others. He was simply the best."

Robinson scouted for the Pistons for 28 years and scouted part-time for the NFL's Detroit Lions for



Will Robinson

22 years.

Midway through the 2003-04 season, en route to their third title, the Pistons renamed their locker room the "Will Robinson Locker Room of Champions."

"He's someone that's going to be missed, not only by the Pistons but by the City of Detroit," Pistons coach Flip Saunders said.

"He was a civil-rights pioneer," said Pistons trainer Mike Abdenour, hired by the franchise in the mid-1970s. "He didn't let the color of his skin deter him from his dreams."

"I think it's really ironic that the NAACP had a big event here last night and Will passed away the next day," he said. The NAACP's annual Fight for Freedom Fund Dinner was Sunday in Detroit.

Candidate's brother-in-law at SEI

of Obama's wife, Michelle. The Democratic presidential contender is a basketball fan who played on Hawaii's state championship team in 1979 and plays pickup games on the campaign trail.

Basketball was a logical vehicle for a voter drive, Robinson said, because it is a way to reach out to the younger people, who are historically less likely to vote.

"People older than me have said they haven't seen anything like

this since Kennedy," Robinson said. "I've seen younger Americans getting involved in politics for the very first time. And I have seen older Americans who felt disenfranchised coming back to get involved."

Contestants who brought in five new voter registrations answered Obama trivia questions for the right to compete in the event. The first eight to answer correctly were selected for the game, including two substitutes.

State Sen. Margaret Carter, a Portland Democrat, rallied a crowd of about 75 at the event, which the Obama campaign held in advance of the Oregon primary election May 20.

Jones and Frye were on their first week of summer vacation after the Blazers' season.

"I'm excited to be involved in something that's going to change the country," Jones said. "Barack gives me the impression that he's that guy."

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