

Portland Observer Auto Review

News and reviews on new motor vehicles

2008 Toyota Land Cruiser

King of the Road

BY KATHLEEN CARR

Toyota's iconic Land Cruiser enters its seventh generation for 2008, positioned once again to be the standard-bearer among the ranks of true off-road-capable sport utilities. Toyota's Land Cruiser is famous for its globe-trotting off-road prowess.

It's unusual to find SUVs in today's marketplace that are still engineered for more than ordinary use. The all-new 2008 Toyota Land Cruiser is one of those few remaining that are capable in more than one venue.

The Land Cruiser is designed to transport people and gear over any kind of road or primitive trail, in any kind of weather, with speed, comfort and security. It can tow up to 8500 pounds with the right equipment. It offers integrated comfort and convenience features to rival luxury cars in this price range.

The 2008 Land Cruiser looks pretty much the same as the previous Land Cruiser, but make no mistake: it has been completely re-engineered from the frame up. Refinements include a suite of safety features, state-of-the-art electronics, more power with better mileage, and innovative engineering advancements that permit outstanding performance in contrasting circumstances.

Because of its iconic exterior design, Land Cruisers never seem to look dated or go out of style. The

2008 Toyota Land Cruiser, with its upright bodywork and wide, flat hood, is unmistakable. The slightly reduced, more sophisticated front headlamps are the most obvious differences, as is the lower, more fluid beltline as viewed from the side. LED tail lights are another contemporary touch.

While the interior is not opulent in design, there is nothing cheap or garish about it. Attention to detail can be seen in the stitching on the leather and the tight seams between the components of the dash and console.

There is no bling factor in the Land Cruiser design, which is solid, stable and grounded in every sense of the word. It is designed to be impressive more for what it is, than how it looks.

To drive a Land Cruiser is to feel secure and in command. Press the start button and the gauges light up, needles bounce once, the steering wheel and mirrors return to previously set positions, and the V8 quietly hums to life. Find Reverse, and the back-up camera displays what's behind you on the navigation screen.

Civilized ride quality is achieved by use of coil-over spring-and-shock combinations in the front, and a four-link/coil spring setup in the rear.

Throttle response is improved due to the use of the 5.7-liter V8, a 381-hp engine shared with the Tundra full-size pickup. Toyota has incorporated the latest variable valve timing technology, cam lobe de-



Specifications: 5.7-Liter 32-Valve Dual VVT-i cam 381-hp @ 401 lb-ft. torque V8 engine; 4WD; 6-Speed Dual O/D w/sequential shift mode automatic transmission; 13-City 18-Highway MPG; \$71,385. MSRP

sign, and intake manifold tuning to optimize the engine for power output, fuel economy and reduced emissions. Like any good truck engine, the 5.7-liter makes more torque (401 pound-feet) than horsepower, allowing the Land Cruiser to loaf around at low rpm and still offer ready throttle response.

A good part of the drivability improvements are due to use of a slick six-speed automatic transmission. The transmission offers a very low first gear for heavy loads, and two overdrive gears at the top, in-

cluding a super overdrive top gear that accounts for the smooth, efficient highway cruise mode. The automatic is computer controlled, constantly cross-checking with the engine's computer, to determine a shift pattern based on driving conditions.

And for those moments when push does come to shove, the Land Cruiser lives up to the capability requirements of a traditional, authentic four-wheel-drive truck.

A new Toyota system, Crawl Control, acts like ABS on steep downhill. It keeps the vehicle from rolling too fast, allowing the driver to select from three speed settings, depending on the surface condition and steepness of the hill. No braking is needed; the driver simply steers the vehicle. With practice, we found we could select from the three Crawl Control settings on the fly, using the system to maintain a comfortable speed as steep-

ness varied. Another significant advancement is a new, very clever suspension control technology. The suspension is built around a robust stabilizer bar that enhances handling on smooth, paved surfaces. The system is not electronic, but hydro/mechanical, and requires no power source.

Safety features include multi-terrain ABS with Electronic Brake Force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist; VSC electronic stability control with cutoff switch; Active Traction Control (A-TRAC); dual-stage advanced airbags, seat-mounted side-impact airbags and front knee airbags for driver and front passenger; second-row seat-mounted side airbags; three-row roll-sensing side curtain airbags with roll-sensing cutoff switch; tire-pressure monitoring system.

The Land Cruiser's brick-outhouse reputation for durability and long-term value is still intact. Used Land Cruisers are scarce and command high prices. But for those who aspire to the best and can pay the price at the pump, the Land Cruiser has no equal.

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