

Scion tC – Funky, Spunky Little Car

By Frank S. Washington

DETROIT – Toyota may have finally gotten it right. Despite its amazing sales success, Toyota has tried and failed for years to attract substantial numbers of younger buyers into its showrooms. It's been a while since a Toyota has been considered the car to have by the 30 and under set. Toyota had to invent a whole new brand to get the job done but it looks like it might have something with the Scion, a new line of vehicles aimed at younger car buyers. The line up consists of three models: the xA, xB and tC . The latter is considered the performance model of the group and I test drove it for one week. Before I even got into the vehicle I could sense its road presence. I don't know whether it was intended but the tC sport coupe had the hood of Volvo's S40, the headlamps of BMW's 5-Series, 17-inch split six-spoke wheels that reminded me of the Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG and lessen the mass of the bumper and it looked to me like the wide-mouth grille of the next generation Audi. If you're going to use a hodgepodge of styling elements, by design or not, then Audi, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo is not a bad group to mimic. But beyond its looks, I found the Scion tC to be exhilarating. What's more, my 21-year-old daughter said she liked the Scion tC more than she did the Toyota Celica. She test drove both cars and found the Scion to be lighter, more maneuverable, sportier, the ride was better than the Celica, and the price point was right. The base price of my test vehicle was \$16,465, and for that price I thought the standard equipment bordered on phenomenal. It included a panorama moonroof, side marker lamps integrated into side mirrors, four-wheel disc brakes and 17-inch alloy wheels with a graphite-color finish. It had cruise control, a rear cargo tonneau cover, auto up/down automatic front windows with pinch protection, in-key remote keyless entry, a rolling code engine immobilizer security system, auto-off headlamps, and an electronic hatch with power release. All three Scion models come with air conditioning, power windows, door locks and mirrors and a chrome-plated exhaust tip. There were sport bucket seats and they slid forward making access to the rear seats easier. Once back there, I had plenty of legroom but there wasn't much space between the top of my head and the roof liner. It's a very small coupe and the fact that I could get in the back seat with any level of comfort was a bit of an achievement.

VEHICLE OF THE WEEK

Scion tC

**The Staff
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The tC offered a smooth ride with easy handling. Equipped with a 6-speed automatic transmission with Dynamic Rev Management®, the shifting is easy. High-end projector beam headlights are specially made to maximize roadway illumination. The alloy wheels, with redesigned 18" machine-finish, make you wish you were on the track. The tC's standard Pioneer® Touch Screen Display Audio system makes the music sound like you are live at a concert. Estimated mileage: 23 city / 31 highway. Suggested retail price \$19,965 manual transmission; \$20,965 automatic.



ment. Still, I was just sitting in my driveway. My sense was that I wouldn't want to ride in back of the tC for more than 20 minutes. And although they call the car a sport coupe, or a two-door lift back, it's a three-door hatchback. Open what looks like the trunk lid and you're looking right into the car. I've never had a problem with hatchbacks, I find them very utilitarian. Optional equipment included seat-based side impact air bags and air curtains, a premium audio system with six-disc in-dash CD player and MP3 capability, rear spoiler lip and a sport tuned exhaust system. The extras pushed the sticker on my test vehicle to \$19,339. That's not bad for a funky, spunky little car. That exhaust-system added to a driving experience that was sensually explosive. I can't remember the last vehicle from Toyota; it may have been the Supra that was a blast to drive. Powered by a 2.4-liter dual overhead cam four-cylinder engine with variable valve timing, the tC was rated at 160 horsepower at 5,700 rpm and 163 pound-feet of torque at 4,000 rpm. This was respectable street punch for a compact car. My test vehicle was the five-speed manual version and I had a good time driving it. Normally, I'll pass when it comes to sticks in

small cars. However, this short shifter was fairly smooth, cross gate shifts were easy, I didn't have a problem finding gears and there was no road vibration that reverberated back up through shifter, or the pedals. That sort of vibration is not uncommon in small cars equipped with manual transmissions. The tC responded like a sports car. It was quick, the ride was smooth, it was highly maneuverable and it had some road presence. In other words, folks took a look at it. I found two things about the vehicle that I could do without. The center stack has a silver satin template. Its plastic made to look like brushed aluminum, although the climate control dial is cast aluminum. I've never experienced the use of silver satin executed nicely. I just don't like the stuff. Sometimes shinny is not better. My other quibble is the tC's A pillars. They're pretty thick. Combined with the side view mirror housings, it causes blind spots that are larger than normal. In congested areas, particularly with pedestrians, the tC's larger blind spots are cause for a bit more care when cornering. The company started selling Scion in California last year. Last June, Toyota started a national roll out of its new brand. So far so good, the new cars have been well received and they've gotten good press. It looks like Toyota finally has something that young car buyers find interesting and alluring. Just don't call it a Toyota – the tC and its siblings are Scions. Frank S. Washington can be reached at PO Box 23167, Detroit, MI, 48223. Or e-mail him at frank@aboutthatcar.com

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