

2010 TOYOTA VENZA



Toyota has unveiled a new vehicle called Venza, which it presents as a crossover sedan and refuses to identify as a station wagon. Incidentally, the latter designation is banned from the vocabulary of American consumers, despite their past fondness for this type of vehicle. Toyota's semantic and linguistic contortions aside, the Venza can easily be considered a Camry station wagon, since it rests on a modified version of the Camry platform. It also comes with elements originating from the Highlander in addition to its own specially designed parts. Distinguishing the Venza from a classic station wagon are its higher ground clearance and its 19- or 20-inch tires, depending on the model. The Venza is similar in size to the Volvo XC70 and Subaru Outback.

Interior and cargo area

The front seats are easy to access and comfortable, with lumbar adjustment for the driver. The driving position is very good. Legroom is generous, but with the sunroof, headroom is a bit tight for tall people. The bottom of the doors is lower than the doorsill, which keeps the sills clean.

Access to the rear bench is easy as well, and seating is comfortable for two adults. There is lots of legroom but, again, headroom is a bit limited for tall individuals. Both sides of the 60/40 split seatback recline up to 14 degrees. The seatback does not fold completely flat to the floor, and it leaves a gap behind the front seats when it's folded.

The cargo area is relatively spacious, even with the bench in an upright position, and, of course, folding the seat down expands it considerably. The rear hatch opens high, and because of its angled shape, the space behind the middle of the seats is 10 cm deeper than on the sides. Length as measured from the middle is 93 cm behind the upright bench seatback and 197 cm behind the front seatbacks. The floor is 104 cm wide between the fender wells, and height reaches 75 cm. Unfortunately, the front-passenger seatback does not fold flat, and there are no anchor points for a cargo net.

Convenience and safety features

The interior is very well finished in quality materials. Soundproofing is deficient for road noise and perfectible for engine noise in average to strong acceleration. There is an abundance of good storage spaces.

Controls and instruments are well placed. Contrary to many vehicles, the cabin is not overloaded with controls, and their simple layout makes them easier to use. Only the outside mirrors control is not lighted at night. Air conditioning is efficient.

The windshield washer nozzles are under the edge of the hood and can easily be blocked by snow and ice.

As standard equipment, all models come with a tilt-and-telescoping steering column, dual-zone climate control, an eight-way power-adjusted driver's seat, heated outside mirrors, cruise control, seven airbags, electrochromatic rearview mirror with compass, stability control, four-wheel antilock disc brakes, alloy wheels, and more. Of course, several options packages are offered and can include heated leather seats, panoramic sunroof, navigation system, power liftgate, Xenon headlamps, backup camera, etc.

Standard safety equipment includes dual front, side and curtain airbags and a driver's knee airbag; five head restraints; four-wheel disc brakes with ABS; and stability control. The wide D-pillars create blind spots on a three-quarter-rear angle, and the double A-pillars may be bothersome for some drivers; otherwise, visibility is good. Without the optional backup camera, it is hard to judge distances when backing up. The headlights lack range in the low-beam position.

In U.S. government crash tests, the Venza obtained the top five-star rating for driver and front passenger protection in a frontal impact and for all-occupant protection in a side crash. It earned four stars for rollover resistance. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety awarded the Venza a Good rating, its highest, for driver protection in a frontal offset impact, and for all occupants in a side or rear crash.

Engine and transmission

The 3.5-litre V6 develops 268 horsepower and 246 pound-feet of torque for acceleration and pickup that are both lively and well felt. This engine is well adapted though a bit raspy on start-up and for a brief period during warm-up. According to Toyota, it uses about one litre per 100 kilometres more fuel than the new, 2.7-litre four-cylinder that's also available. The latter engine outputs 182 horsepower and 182 pound-feet of torque, which is sufficient for ordinary driving. However, with a load or when driving in hilly terrain, you can feel that the engine is working hard, and fuel consumption may reach V6 proportions.

Both these engines are mated with a well-gearred, six-speed automatic transmission that functions smoothly at all times. They can also be hooked to an on-demand all-wheel-drive system. The beauty of this system is that it doesn't wait for a front wheel to slip to send power to the rear wheels. It does it as soon as, and no matter how, the driver accelerates. It can transfer up to 50 percent of torque to the rear wheels, and if no slippage is detected it redirects 100 percent of torque to the front wheels. The vehicle is equipped with a hill-start feature that holds it in place for a few seconds in an incline.

On the road

The four-wheel independent suspension delivers a very smooth ride on most road surfaces. However, the 20-inch 50-profile tires cause a stiff reaction on some bumpy patches. Handling is good—not outstanding, but reasonably competent and even a tad spirited. The Venza is a bit sensitive to side winds. Its 20.5 cm of ground clearance allow it to venture onto broken terrain, especially when equipped with all-wheel-drive, but it obviously is not a trailbreaker.

A word about tires: Four-cylinder models ride on 19-inch (P245/55R19) tires, whereas V6 models come with 20-inchers (P245/50R20). These are performance tires; replacement and winter tires will likely come at a hefty price. It makes you wonder why Toyota would choose such expensive tires for a family vehicle with a starting price under \$30,000; several competing vehicles are equipped with more affordable, 17-inch tires.

The power steering is well tuned, stable and relatively quick. It is short on road sensation, but the turning circle is quite small. The brakes are powerful and resist well to fade.

Inspection

In our inspection at a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre, we saw that overall, the Venza is well built. Its platform is relatively sturdy but unevenly protected against corrosion, though most joints are sealed. The radiator expansion tank is close enough to the windshield washer tank to cause confusion. The openings in the front grille, under the bumper, are large enough for debris to get through and damage the air-conditioner condenser. Grime can filter in behind the rear fender liners. There is no place to attach ropes so that, for example, you could stabilize a canoe on the roof. The overhead camshafts of the V6 engine are chain driven.

Conclusion

Though its dimensions are very similar to those of the Camry, the Venza is actually much more practical, thanks to its roomier interior and higher ground clearance. Its handling is also a bit more dynamic, and enough models are available to attract several types of buyers. It is unfortunate that it loses points for its tire dimensions.

PROS: spacious, comfortable seats, powerful V6, smooth transmission, fit and finish, roadability.

CONS: three-quarter-rear visibility, perfectible soundproofing, headlights lack range, stiff reactions with 20-inch tires, washer nozzles under edge of hood, cost of replacement tires.

2010 TOYOTA VENZA

Engine: 16-valve, 2.7-litre 4-cylinder; 24-valve, 3.5-litre V6

Horsepower: 182 hp at 5,800 rpm; 268 hp at 6,200 rpm

Torque: 182 lb-ft at 4,200 rpm; 246 lb-ft at 4,700 rpm

Transmission: 6-speed automatic

Suspension: fully independent

Brakes: disc/disc

Wheelbase: 277.5 cm

Length: 480 cm

Width: 190.5 cm

Height: 161 cm

Weight: 1,705 to 1,835 kg

Tires: P245/55R19; P245/50R20

Maximum towing capacity: 1,587 kg

Airbags: dual front, plus two side, two curtain airbags and one airbag for driver' knees

Fuel consumption with V6 and AWD:

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 11.5 L/100 km (25 mpg)

Highway: 7.9 L/100 km (36 mpg)

Test result: 12 L/100 km (24 mpg)

Test temperature: 6°C to 21°C

CO₂ emissions: 4,742 kg/20,000 km**Fuel tank capacity:** 67 litres**Fuel requirement:** regular grade gasoline**Acceleration:**

0–100 km/h: 7.9 seconds

60–100 km/h: 5.8 seconds

Competition: Chevrolet Equinox, Dodge Journey, Honda Accord Crosstour, Ford Edge, GMC Terrain, Subaru Outback, Volkswagen Passat Wagon**Warranty:**

- Full basic coverage: 3 years/60,000 km
- Powertrain: 5 years/100,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 3 years/60,000 km
- Perforation damage: 5 years/unlimited km
- Emissions control system: 3 years/60,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module, onboard diagnostic system).

Factory replacement parts:

- Rear bumper: \$735
- Front brake disc: \$118
- Brake pads: \$83
- Muffler: \$545
- Front fender: \$190

Price according to trim level:

- 4-cylinder: \$29,160
- 4-cylinder AWD: \$30,610
- V6: \$30,650
- V6 AWD: \$32,100

Main options:

- Premium package: \$2,240 to \$4,250
- Touring package: \$5,910 (V6 AWD)
- Navigation and JBL package: \$8,760

Price as tested: \$38,010**Freight and preparation:** \$1,490**Dealers:** Quebec: 71 Canada: 251