

# Toyota Avensis

*Featured model: 2.0 CDX Estate*



**W**ITH ALL THE EXCITING NEW additions to Toyota's line-up, recently – the drop-top MR2 and a striking new Celica coupé, a refitted and re-engined Corolla, plus brand-new Previa MPV and sport utility RAV4 models – it's all too easy to overlook Toyota's Mondeo-class stalwart, the Avensis.

Launched early in 1998, the British-built Avensis is Toyota's best-seller in the UK, succeeding the company's first 'Made in Britain' model, the Carina E.

Despite offering class-leading fuel economy and back seat space, together with renowned Toyota build quality and reliability, the Carina tended to be damned with faint praise – a reaction that's been inherited to an extent by its more contemporary looking successor.

With a choice of four engines, a multitude of trim levels and saloon, five-door 'Liftback' and attractive estate car body styles, the Avensis offers no less than 37 discrete variants in its line-up – comfortably sufficient to compete in the cut-and-thrust, upper-medium Mondeo/Vectra market segment.

Mated with top-level CDX trim (replete with requisite wood veneer and full leather seating) and the estate's capacious if not hugely cavernous body, the lusty two-litre provides brisk yet relaxed executive transport during the week, and can then undertake all manner of more space-hungry duties at the weekend.

It can mix it with the best in foot-to-the-floor repmobile journeying, yet pulls just as impressively from low speed,

and delivers hushed, refined motorway cruising. With air conditioning on most models (climate-controlled on the two-litre), firm supportive seats, a roomy well laid-out cabin and a fine driving position, the Avensis gives its driver a totally untaxing time at the wheel.

Passengers fare almost as well, too, but it's disappointing that the Avensis has lost a little of its predecessor's vast spaciousness – in the back seat, in particular. No complaints with ride comfort, though. Even in estate form, the Avensis soaks up poor surfaces with even more aplomb than the Carina, losing that model's fidgetiness over minor irregularities without feeling too soft or 'floaty' in the process.

The big, low-silled load area is well up to its task of serious cargo carrying, with only prominent wheelarches and the forward-raked tailgate marring space for bigger loads. The 60/40-split back seats fold to form a large, almost flat deck, with upturned cushions forming a useful safety barrier against unruly items.

## VERDICT

**The Avensis is the sort of car whose figures don't tell it all. It offers fine all-round poise, impressive refinement and respectable load space plus, of course, famed build, reliability and general ease of ownership. It's not the cheapest, fastest, roomiest or most stylish estate on offer, but its quiet underlying appeal still takes plenty of beating.**

## AT A GLANCE

*considering size, price and rivals*

<b>Overtaking ability</b>	★★★★○
<b>Space/practicality</b>	★★★★○
<b>Controls/displays</b>	★★★★○
<b>Safety</b>	★★★★○
<b>Handling/steering</b>	★★★○○
<b>Comfort</b>	★★★★○
<b>Fuel economy</b>	★★★○○

## SPECIFICATION

**engine** 1998cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 126bhp at 5400rpm, 131 lb ft at 4400rpm; belt-driven DOHC, 16 valves  
**transmission** 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.4 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.1 in 4th

**suspension** front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: damper/struts, dual links, coil springs

**steering** hydraulic power assistance; 3.1 turns lock-to-lock; 11.0m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.3m for one turn of the wheel)

**brakes** ventilated discs front, drums rear with electronic anti-lock control (standard on all models)

**wheels/tyres** 6in alloy (standard on SR and CDX) with 195/60R15 88H tyres (Michelin Energy MXV 3A on test car); full-size steel spare

## LIKES AND GRIPES

hi-fi double-DIN-sized CD/radio unit easy, no-nonsense controls, clear dials excellent heater allows cooler air to face comfortable, easy-folding back seat

economy good but 'lean burn' units better foot space tight under front seats raked tailgate restricts 'big box' load space competent but a little characterless

## THE AVENSIS RANGE

**body** upper-medium, 4-door saloon, 5-door 'Liftback' and 5-door estate  
**trim levels** S, GS, GLS, SR and CDX  
**engines** petrol: 1.6/99bhp, 1.8/108bhp (lean burn), 2.0/126bhp. diesel: 2.0/86bhp  
**drive** front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4 speed auto available on 1.8/2.0 saloon/liftback, estate 2.0 only)

OVERTAKING ABILITY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>					
<i>Genial, stress-free pace from this subtly revised 2-litre. Punchy yet demure delivery belies 4400rpm torque peak, despite relaxed gearing</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ <sup>th</sup> gear	⑤ <sup>th</sup> gear		
20-40mph	-	7.8	11.3		
30-50mph	3.5	7.3	10.4		
40-60mph	4.6	7.6	10.2		
50-70mph	5.9	8.2	11.4		
<b>30-70mph</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>21.8</b>		
max speed in each gear (*using 6250 rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	33	56	83	107	123

SAFETY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>									
<i>Four airbags, ABS and five three-point seatbelts standard on all models. Reassuring brakes, too, with handily placed handbrake</i>									
<b>braking</b>	<b>dry road stopping distance</b> <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>								
pedal feel <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>pedal load</th> <th>distance</th> </tr> <tr> <td>10 kg</td> <td>34½</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 kg</td> <td>26½ <b>best stop</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>+4kg ie 24 kg</td> <td>28m</td> </tr> </table>	pedal load	distance	10 kg	34½	20 kg	26½ <b>best stop</b>	+4kg ie 24 kg	28m
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in emergency <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>									
handbrake <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>									

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (saloon, tested May '98)			
front impact	50%	side impact	83%
overall 68%	★★★★○	side impact	★★★○

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY <span style="float:right">★★★★○</span>			
<i>Less roomy than old Carina E, yet still a spacious holdall. No major novelties but lots of handy stowage space around the cabin</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door estate)</i>	<b>inside</b>	<i>(† with sunroof)</i>	
<b>outside</b>	front - legroom	86-108	
length	- headroom	92-96†	
width - inc mirrors	rear - typical leg/	98	
- mirrors folded	kneeroom	76	
height (inc roof bars)	- headroom	98	
load sill height	- hiproom	133	
(inside/outside)	9/62	<b>load space (all seats in use)</b>	
<b>steering</b>		(litres/cu ft)	450/15.9
turns lock-to-lock	3.1	load length	96-178
turning circle (metres)	11.0	full length to fascia	256
easy to park/garage?		load width	92-140
	★★★★○	load height (to shelf)	51

SECURITY FEATURES			
central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✗	luggage security	★★★★○
deadlocks	✗		
✓ standard	0 factory option	✗ not available	

**HANDLING AND STEERING** ★★★★○  
*Avensis doesn't match Mondeo's fine chassis or Passat's solidity, but Toyota's load-lugger is still a pleasing, easy-going all-rounder*



**COMFORT** ★★★★○  
*Neat cabin, fine driving position and relaxed cruising. Roomy, too, but back seat and boot lose a little of the old Carina E's expanse*

**CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS** ★★★★○  
*A model of neat, clear user-friendliness, though top models' wood veneer looks a bit out of place. Fluid, easy controls – just as you would expect in a Toyota – give a totally stress-free time at the wheel*



**FUEL ECONOMY** ★★★★○  
*Good par for the class with 40-plus mpg easily on tap, but 2-litre fails to replicate 1.6 and 1.8 'lean burn' units' ace economy*

AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)		
worst (hard/urban)	22	urban	24.6
best (gentle/rural)	43	extra urban	41.5
<b>overall mpg on test</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>33.2</b>
realistic tank capacity	53 litres	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	202g/km
typical range	385 miles	car tax band	D

HOW THE AVENSIS ESTATE COMPARES*	engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
<b>TOYOTA AVENSIS 2.0</b>	<b>4/1998/126</b>	<b>3280</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>21.8/15.5</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>26½/20</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>98/76</b>	<b>3.1/11.0</b>	<b>457</b>
Ford Mondeo 2.0 16v	4/1989/136	3625	9.5	22.8/15.1	30	27/16	110	100/71	3.0/10.4	463
Mitsubishi Galant 2.0 §	4/1997/134	3095	8.8	23.0/16.5	35	27/16	109	102/78	3.0/11.1	468
Peugeot 406 2.0 §	4/1998/135	3210	10.5	27.2/17.6	32½	25½/36	109	98/72	3.1/11.4	474
Vauxhall Vectra 2.0 16v §	4/1998/136	2850	9.9	27.9/19.8	36	24½/18	111	101/75	3.0/10.9	449
VW Passat 1.8 20v	4/1781/125	3350	10.9	26.2/19.1	31	26½/30	112	100/78	2.8/10.9	467

\* all five-door estates § performance/economy figures for saloon/hatch version tested † all with ABS (p) all with PAS