

# Toyota Picnic

**Featured model: 2.0GLS Automatic**



**M**ATHEMATICALLY, THERE'S ONLY one way that six (or indeed seven) will go into one, but by playing with different seating combinations, the makers of compact MPVs prove otherwise. For its Picnic, Toyota has chosen the 2x2x2 formula (or 2x3x2 in the GS seven-seater version with its centre bench seat).

Although we're broadly talking compact MPVs here, the Picnic is more of a 'tweenie', because at 4½m long it falls roughly midway between the Zafira and Galaxy.

For passengers in the centre row armchairs, this results in no more room than in the shorter Vauxhall – and five-seater Renault Scenic. However, those at the back do benefit from extra knee and legroom, further improved by sliding the centre chairs forward. Getting to the back seats calls for agility, though, and because they're close set and headroom is modest, they're best suited to youngsters. They do recline, however, and, like the centre seats, their backrests fold down to form table tops.

The lively and quietly cruising twin-cam, two-litre engine was complemented on our test vehicle by optional automatic transmission which, while not the smoothest we've encountered when changing down, is all but seamless in its upchanges and delivers cleverly timed and almost imperceptible part-throttle downshifts.

The Picnic corners with grip and precision, but it neither encourages nor rewards enthusiastic handling. It's best simply to sit back, enjoy the comfortable ride and appreciate its easy-going nature.

Not that the driving position will suit everyone, because there are no steering adjustments and only the seat cushion can be raised and lowered. For tallish drivers, however, it's first class.

Lots of window space means excellent all-round vision (provided the forest of head restraints is removed), which simplifies parking. A pair of column stalks work most of the switches, but annoyingly, some of the remaining rocker switches' warning lights are concealed by the driver's hands and the radio/cassette controls are far too small.

There are lost opportunities throughout the air conditioned cabin for the sort of surprise and delight features that so enhance the appeal of the Picnic's rivals – six drinks holders, a power socket and a couple of lidded cubby holes left us underwhelmed.

Luggage space is minimal with the Picnic as a six seater (roof rails are standard), but when the easily unlatched rear seats are removed, a spacious, carpeted luggage hold is revealed.

## VERDICT

**The Picnic can't make up its mind whether it's an MPV, an estate car or a minibus, and doesn't fully succeed in any of these roles. To make matters worse, it's over-priced and under-equipped. What a pity – it's stylish, it performs well and it's a delight to drive.**

## 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 double overhead camshafts, 16 valves  
**transmission** 4-speed automatic with torque converter, front-wheel drive; 24.3mph/1000rpm observed in top gear  
**suspension** front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts; anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam with coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar  
**steering** hydraulic power assistance; 3.3 turns lock-to-lock; 11.4m diameter turning circle between kerbs (18.5m for one turn of the wheel)  
**brakes** ventilated discs front, drums rear, with standard ABS  
**wheels/tyres** 14in steel with 195/65R14T tyres (Michelin Energy XSE on test car); full-size spare

## LIKES AND GRIPES

fan-blown air to mid-row footwells  
 sun visors have cut-outs round mirror  
 man-sized left footrest  
 absence of rear side sills eases exit

long and vague gear selector "wand"  
 lack of footroom under ns front seat  
 excess of plastic on view inside  
 tyre valves too short

## THE PICNIC RANGE

**body** 5-door, 6- and 7-seater, mid-sized (plus) MPV  
**trim levels** GS, GLS  
**engines** petrol: 4cyl/2.0/126bhp  
 turbo-diesel: 4/2.2/86  
**drive** front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4-speed automatic available on 2.0GS and GLS)

OVERTAKING ABILITY		★★★★			
<i>Spirited two-litre “four” gives Picnic either lively performance if you rev it or relaxed progress on a motorway cruise. Kickdown shifts not the smoothest, but part-throttle changes swift and silky</i>					
acceleration in seconds	using kickdown in D - fully automatic (5900 – 6100rpm)				
20-40mph	3.5	30-40mph	2.0		
30-50mph	4.6	30-50mph	4.6		
40-60mph	5.5	30-60mph	7.5		
50-70mph	7.3	30-70mph	11.9		
30-70mph	11.9				
max speed in each gear (*using kickdown for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	
speed (mph)	36	63	99	111	

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY				★☆☆☆☆
<i>Sliding centre armchairs enable legroom to be shared out with those in rear seats; these best for pre-teenagers, however. Luggage space poor until (13kg) back seats removed, but roof rails standard</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door MPV)</i>		<b>inside</b>	(† without sunroof)	
<b>outside</b>		front	- legroom	87-107
length	453		- headroom	95-101†
width - <i>inc mirrors</i>	195	rear	- typical leg/	102(84*)
- <i>mirrors folded</i>	169		kneeroom	80(60*)
height ( <i>with roof bars</i> )	166		- headroom	98(87*)
load sill height			- hiproom	131(104*)
( <i>inside/outside</i> )	18/75	<b>load space</b>	(litres/cu ft)	
<b>steering</b>		( <i>min-max</i> )	195/7-680/24	
turns lock-to-lock	3.3	load length	30-126	
turning circle ( <i>metres</i> )	11.4	full length to fascia	275	
easy to park/garage?		load width	102-124	
	★★★★○	load height ( <i>to shelf/</i>	53/	
		<i>to top of aperture</i> )	96	
*3rd row ( <i>with mid row fully back</i> )				

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★☆☆				
<i>Clear dials, sensible mirrors and lots of glass make life easy for driver. US-style column-mounted gear selector lacks precision. Column stalks fine, but small warning lights easily missed. Radio fiddly</i>				
				

HOW THE PICNIC 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)
TOYOTA PICNIC 2.0 AUTO	4/1998/126	2880	11.9	NA	29	27/18	107	102/80	3.3/11.4	453
Fiat Multipla 1.6	4/1581/103	3780	12.7	29.2/20.6	29	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Ford Galaxy 2.3	4/2295/145	3290	11.0	26.3/19.9	29	26/25	108	104/84	3.3/11.3	462
Honda Shuttle 2.2 auto	4/2156/150	2950	12.2	NA	24½	27½/13½	109	105/72	3.2/12.0	475
Peugeot 806 2.0	4/1998/123	3210	13.4	35.1/23.4	30	27/25	102	97/78	3.0/11.8	445
Vauxhall Zafira 1.8	4/1796/113	3630	11.3	22.4/16.3	32	27/14	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432
All rivals (except Shuttle) tested with manual transmission						* all with ABS		(p) all power assisted		

SAFETY ★★☆☆				
<i>Safety features include anti-lock brakes, two front airbags and front seatbelt pretensioners. All seats have full lap-and-diagonal belts and head restraints. Foam padding in doors, under-floor fuel tank</i>				
<b>braking</b>	★★★★			
pedal feel	★★★★			
in emergency	★★★★			
handbrake	★★☆☆			
		<b>dry road stopping distance</b>		
		from 50mph (with standard ABS)		
		pedal load	distance	
		10kg	38½m	
		18kg	<b>27m best stop</b>	
		+4kg ie 22kg	27½m	

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (tested June 1999)				
front impact	63%	side impact	83%	
overall	74%	★★★★	pedestrian rating	★★☆☆

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★☆☆				
<i>Rapid bend-swinging isn't Picnic's forté – a bit too laid back and relaxed for that. Steering rather low geared for rapid responses, too; tyre grip is reassuring, though, and ABS gives braking confidence</i>				
				
COMFORT ★★☆☆				
<i>Ride nicely absorbent even at low speeds on broken black top – even smoother at speed. Comfortable seats all recline, centre pair have fold-down armrests. Dearth of clever features other MPVs boast</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆				
<i>Almost 30mpg is a fair result for a lively, large-ish two-litre automatic. A fuel-stretching 35mpg is possible with a gentle right foot. Easy-filling tank gives generous range between fill-ups</i>				
<b>AA test results (mpg)</b>		<b>official figures (mpg)</b>		
worst (hard/urban)	21	urban	21.7	
best (gentle/rural)	35	extra urban	36.2	
<b>overall mpg on test</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>29.1</b>	
realistic tank capacity	53 litres	CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	229g/km	
typical range	340 miles	car tax band	D	