tC Remains Top Scion Seller

Ann M. Job

A more powerful and more fuel efficient engine as well as new styling helped boost sales of the three-door Scion tC by 47 percent last year from the year-earlier period.

The long-established sales leader of Toyota's youthful Scion brand also received five out of five stars in its overall crash test rating by the federal government.

Young male drivers lock onto the 2012 tC like heat-seeking missiles.

Judging from the attention the test tC attracted, these guys love getting 180 horsepower at a starting retail price of less than $20,000.

And they know all about adding sporty accessories like big, fancy wheels and optional lowering springs to the tC to make it their very own.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is $19,305 for a 2012 tC with 180-horsepower, four-cylinder engine and six-speed manual transmission. This engine is naturally aspirated, not turbocharged, and it's the same four cylinder that's in the larger, heavier Toyota Camry sedan. A 2012 tC with six-speed automatic has a starting retail price of $20,305.

The tC starting prices are higher than some competitors', such as the 2012 Ford Focus five-door hatchback with a starting MSRP, including destination charge, of $19,095. The base Focus hatch has 160-horsepower, four-cylinder engine and manual transmission.

And, a 2012 Kia Forte 5-Door with 156-horsepower four cylinder and six-speed automatic starts $455 lower than the base tC — at $18,850 — while the uplevel Forte 5-Door with 173-horsepower four cylinder and automatic has a starting retail price of $20,350. The Forte is not offered with a manual.

The tC's big changes occurred for 2011, as the second-generation car debuted. Sales zoomed from 15,204 in calendar 2010 to 22,433 last year, and the tC is basically a carryover for 2012.

The 14.5-foot-long, white test tC sat low to the pavement on low-profile, optional 19-inch wheels that filled the flared fenders with precious little space left. This size of tire is not on the manufacturer option sheets of the Focus and Forte. Even without the bigger wheels, though, the tC's styling is sporty, though the rear-end looks a bit ho-hum.

Fabric-covered black, front bucket seats had a sporty appearance, too, and provided better support than expected. But putting the tC's driver seat up in height jammed the head restraint into the ceiling and made it nearly impossible to get the

seatback moved aside to let passengers get into the back seat.

There are seat belts for three back there, but I wouldn't attempt to fit three adults. Two adults were confined enough, contending with small side windows that don't open, bulky, view-blocking front buckets in front of them, and 34.6 inches of measured legroom.

Note the Focus has only 33.2 inches of rear-seat legroom, while the Forte has 35 inches.

And with no second doors on the sides of the tC, everyone climbing into the back has to contort to get behind the bucket seats. Also, the tC's sloping, coupe-like roofline means the 36.4 inches of rear headroom is less than what's in the back seat of the Focus and Forte.

Cargo space maxes out at 34.5 cubic feet with the back seatbacks folded down. The cargo space is shallow and is less than the 44.8 cubic feet in the Focus hatchback. Items in the cargo area also are under the large rear window and so can get hot in the sun.

Clearly, the tC is not a big-time people and cargo hauler. But for a solitary driver and/or driver and front passenger, the tC can be a satisfying ride.

It's expressive, and the horsepower and generous 173 foot-pounds of torque at 4,100 gives more than a peppy feel.

Scion officials point out that fuel mileage is improved from previous tCs. The tester with automatic, for example, had a government rating of 23 miles per gallon in city driving and 31 mpg on the highway. But this is lower than most other four-cylinder-powered compact cars that have less power. For instance, a 2012 Focus with automatic can carry a 31/37-mpg rating.

During the test drive, which was 65 percent city and 35 highway, the test tC averaged just 23 mpg.

The ride in the tC was nonstop road noise and vibrations. Passengers felt even small road imperfections, and minor potholes came through with a teeth-jarring ferocity. On smooth asphalt, the test tC conveyed a rhythmic "thrum" that made me wonder if a wheel was out of balance.

Good-sized brake discs — ventilated in front only — gave strong stopping power, and steering was nicely weighted and felt less-assisted than expected. The thick, leather-wrapped, three-spoke steering wheel is a nice touch.

But the grooved, hard, black plastic on the test car's top of dashboard smeared easily with dust or dirt that I couldn't just wipe off.

The optional radio and navigation system looked cheap and like an aftermarket part. Users need to go through some unnecessary menu screens to manage the

display.

The optional, stationary rear spoiler was visible in the rearview mirror and reduced, just a bit, the rear views.

More troubling was the large, body metal pillars at each side of the rear window. In the test car, it was impossible to see what was approaching the car as I backed up out of slanted parking spots. A rearview camera is a necessity, in my view, but it wasn't listed among available options.

Lastly, the thin tC radio antenna sits atop the right rear fender, next to the cargo opening and can be whacked by a large item going inside the tC.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/03/2014 - 5:05am*):
http://www.impomag.com/news/2012/01/tc-remains-top-scion-seller