

History of the Toyota RAV4 by Betsy Bearden

The Toyota RAV4 (Recreational Active Vehicle with 4-wheel drive) was the first compact crossover SUV and it was introduced to the U.S. in 1996. As of 2006, the RAV4 moved into the midsize crossover SUV arena. This is indeed the one to watch. As of 2011, RAV4 sales have surpassed all other Toyota SUV sales in the U.S. It is fair to say the Toyota RAV4 is indeed Moving Forward.

Today's RAV4 is close to Toyota's midsize Highlander in length and actually has a more powerful V6 engine. It can seat up to seven passengers with an optional third-row seat (when not needed it folds out of sight) and the second-row seat moves forward and backward to adjust for more legroom. The RAV4 is well known for its enormous cargo space.

If you need to haul around bulky or space-eating musical equipment from one gig to another, or anything else for that matter, all you need to do is flip a lever on the second-row seats; that's all. The result? How about a smooth, flat floor, with an impressive 73 cubic feet of cargo space; if that's not enough, the RAV4 can tow up to 3,500 pounds, and it has a luggage rack to boot.

Will it have the muscle to handle a heavy load? If you opt for the 3.5-liter V6 with a 5-speed automatic transmission, you are looking at 269 horses under the hood and 246 lb.-ft. of torque that will take you from 0-60 in about 7 seconds. This is not too shabby for a midsize crossover SUV. And the mileage is also pretty impressive with the V-6. You can expect 19 mpg in city and 27 mpg on the open road. The 2.5, 4-cylinder, with a 4-speed automatic transmission can also muscle up with its 179 horsepower and it offers 22 mpg in city and 28 highway.

Going into 2012, there are three models available: Base, Sport, and Limited. (The RAV4 EV [plug-in electric model] is slated to return sometime in 2012. It was originally sold as a fleet lease vehicle between 1997 and 2003.) All models come with an automatic transmission and they can be had in front wheel or four-wheel-drive.

As far as safety: The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety tests gave the RAV4 the top rating of "Good" in both the frontal-offset and side-impact crash tests. All models are equipped with Toyota's Star Safety System, and the electronic power steering in the RAV4 makes for easy parking, and maneuvering.

No matter which model you choose, you have chosen the rising star of Toyota's SUV's. If you want an SUV that drives like a car, offers a quiet, roomy cabin, handles perfect, zips right along in traffic, and is totally responsive, this is the SUV for you.

References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toyota_RAV4

<http://www.edmunds.com/toyota/rav4/2012/>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5G5tAKz_94