

TEST DRIVING A HYBRID

By *Tim Saunders,*
Motoring Correspondent

In a way it's surprising that the Toyota Rav 4 has a 2.5-litre petrol engine. Often these days larger vehicles can be equipped with smaller engines than we might expect, for instance, the Honda Civic has just a 1-litre engine, the Seat Leon a 1.5 litre and so on.

But this large Rav 4 is a hybrid so that must compensate by relying on the electric charge. I wonder.

These days whatever you choose to do, from taking a photo to driving a car, the process has been simplified so that anyone can do it without too much difficulty or indeed expertise. I can't help feeling this when I sit on the black leather driver's seat and gaze around at my surroundings. Gone is the manual gearbox and traditional handbrake. Like with a digital camera, the Rav 4 is very much a point and click affair. Push that starter button while holding the foot brake down and off you drive. It doesn't seem to matter that this is a large vehicle, you could be driving a considerably smaller Yaris. That's an achievement for the designers. That must be why so many mums on the school run favour these massive machines. The ride height allows for a good view of the road ahead and seems to give an enhanced feeling of security. But this is also hugely

advantageous when driving down badly potholed country roads because it is high enough to avoid any damage to the underside. A standard car, lower to the ground, could easily get scraped.

The children like it in the back. The black leather interior is hardwearing and comfortable. It is easy to adjust the driver's seat, which is electrically operated. 'Can you remove the blind from the sunroof Daddy?' asks Henry (5). 'I can go one better than that,' I reply, opening the large panoramic sunroof – very welcome on a hot summer's day. There's also excellent air conditioning and a great sound system; everything you need for a family outing.

We point it towards the South Downs and I soon discover the speed limiter which allows me to set it at 50mph so that I don't get caught by the speed cameras on the motorway. Gone are the days when you could drive at 70mph on the M27. But change is good for you they say. It can't be progress though, can it? One thing's for sure the Rav 4 provides its driver and occupants with a relaxing environment.

It is a pleasingly fast vehicle and the boot is large enough to cope with our needs.

Founder and editor of 'Travel & motoring magazine', Tim Saunders is an advanced motorist and journalist. He has always been passionate about motoring and regularly reviews cars from the leading manufacturers.



FACTS AT A GLANCE

Toyota Rav 4 Excel 2.5 Hybrid 2WD + Premium Pack

0-60mph: 8.1secs

CO2: 131g/km

Economy: 48-60mpg

Top speed: 111mph

Power: 214bhp

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