

Toyota gets fast and furious with GR Corolla

For a moment, forget everything you know about the Toyota Corolla. Forget that it has been the best-selling car of all time since 1997. Forget that every year it is one of the top sellers in the Toyota lineup. Forget that it gets great fuel economy and is very practical. Forget that it pretty much defines what a commuter car should be. Forget all that, because the 2025 Toyota GR Corolla does, as it is basically the exact opposite of what the regular Corolla stands for. But as great as the normal Corolla is, the GR Corolla is in a league of its own.

The GR Corolla is Superman as the standard Corolla is Clark Kent. Created by Toyota's Gazoo Racing entity, the same group responsible for the GR Supra and GR86, the GR Corolla is a rally-car-inspired hot hatchback that is fortified with a stiffer body structure, a snarling 300-horsepower turbocharged engine, all-wheel-drive, and a suspension designed to convert corners and turns into quickly fading memories.

The GR is comprehensively reengineered and upgraded from the standard Corolla, starting with the basic structure and body of the car. Up front, there is a wider front end with fender vents, a massive front grill and functional hood vents. The roof is decked out in forged carbon fiber while side rocker panels give it a low stance. At the rear there are more fender flares and a triple exhaust system. Underneath all that is a body shell that is stiffened with more than 300 extra welds and 9 feet of additional adhesive.

Inside, the GR Corolla shares most of its cabin with the standard Corolla hatchback - no need to mess up a good thing. The infotainment system is handled by an 8-inch touchscreen that is super easy to use and navigate through while the gauges are housed in a 12.3-inch digital gauge cluster. Seats are done in a suede and faux-leather upholstery that wear the GR emblem on their headrests - about the only hint inside of what lies under the hood.

And under the hood is a 1.6-liter turbocharged three-cylinder that punches out 300 horsepower and 295 lb-ft of torque. That power spins all four wheels by way of a six-speed manual transmission or new-for-2025 eight-speed automatic. A completely redesigned suspension assures that all that power makes it to the wheels in a proper manner.

Toyota is offering the GR Corolla in three trim levels. At its core is the Core, which includes 18-inch wheels and high-performance brakes. Move up to the Premium and a JBL audio system, dual-zone automatic climate control, navigation, heated front seats, heated steering wheel and wireless device charging are added in. The Premium Plus gets all the above along with different



wheels, rear spoiler and a heads-up display.

With its boy-racer looks, the GR Corolla is fun to look at. But the real fun is behind the wheel. The tester arrived with the six-speed manual gearbox and is one of the best manual gearboxes around, giving satisfying, positive and direct gear changes at any speed. The manual transmission helps make the GR Corolla one of the most exciting and engaging cars on the market. It's easy and fun to row through the gears, watch it rev up to its 7,200-RPM redline on the clear digital dash while its three-pipe exhaust makes all the right noises. With its 300 horses packed under the hood and the turbo cranking out 25 psi of boost, the hot-rod Corolla hits 60 mph in just 5 seconds flat and screams through the quarter mile at 13.6 seconds. Rumor has it, the automatic is even quicker.

Being that the GR Corolla is a Corolla, there is some practical functionality to it. The hatch area does have 17.8 cubic feet of cargo room, which is about typical for a hatchback of this size. But being a GR, there is a rear strut brace for enhanced handling that limits carrying large items. And don't expect 30+ mpg fuel economy. The little engine slurps gas at the rate of 24 mpg combined city & highway (21 city / 28 highway).

As fun as the GR Corolla is, ponying up the cash to buy one is not. Prices for the base GR Corolla start at \$40,300, which is 50% higher than that of a regular Corolla hatchback. The tester, a fully decked out Premium Plus, has an MSRP of \$48,323. While that is a heavy price to pay for a Corolla, one must realize all the unique performance hardware and extra care that goes into assembling the GR Corolla, and it is done at a dedicated facility. And to add to that, production volume is limited, so getting one may be difficult.

Wearing the vaunted "GR" badge carries a heavy load, and there is no doubt that the GR Corolla is worthy of it. Yes, it's pricey, but given the GR Corolla's performance and undeniable fun-to-drive factor, it is well worth it. Remember now, it's a Corolla.

- Christopher A. Randazzo

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