

Prime Time Prius! Toyota's hybrid still the way to go

The more time I spend with EV vehicles and having to deal with charging them and determining how far I can go on the current charge, the more I realize how much better and convenient hybrids are. Hybrids are still part EV, as they have a battery and an electric motor, but thankfully they don't rely on the battery 100 percent, since they also have a conventional gas-powered internal combustion engine. And probably the best hybrid on the road today is the one that made hybrid a household name - the Toyota Prius.

When the Toyota Prius hybrid first made the scene nearly 25 years ago, it was a breakthrough for fuel economy and the auto industry as a whole. Since then, the Prius has been the benchmark when it comes to hybrid vehicles.

Now in its fifth generation, the 2024 Prius continues to be the poster child for modern

car efficiency. And going with the Prius Prime, which is a Plug-in Hybrid, or a PHV, it allows you to be one step closer to being a full EV, yet still be a hybrid vehicle. You can consider the Prius Prime as being the middle ground between a standard Prius and an all-out EV.

A PHV has the advantage over a regular hybrid in that it allows the car to be driven solely on electricity, also known as EV (Electric Vehicle) mode. Once the battery is depleted, the vehicle returns to hybrid mode. Sounds like a win-win situation. And it is - with the only drawback being the range in EV mode tends to be rather short. The first-generation Prius PHV had a range of just 14 miles before it went to hybrid mode. Today, the Prius Prime can travel between 29 and 44 miles on electricity before it switches over to hybrid mode.



While the main emphasis of the Prius is obviously fuel-efficiency and being friendly to the environment, the Prius Prime happens to be a technologically advanced automobile. On the exterior, it uses ultra-efficient LED lighting for the headlamps, turn signals, and taillights along with a solar-paneled roof. These features, combined with a sleek, futuristic design makes the Prius Prime a real head turner. Hard to believe since the Prius was usually considered an awkward car.

Then there is the interior. The cabin features a wraparound dash a sizable center-mounted infotainment screen (8-inch for the SE, 12.3-inch for the XSE and XSE Premium). Another screen is mounted in front of the driver for the gauges and driving information. One big change is the shifter - it is no longer in the dash and is now in a more conventional location on the center console.

Powering the Prius Prime is a 160-hp 2.0-liter gas engine that pairs with two electric motors. The result is a combined 220 horsepower being sent to the front wheels (all-wheel drive is not offered). The hybrid system uses a 13.6-kWh battery pack.

On the road, the Prius Prime gets the nod for being the quickest Prius ever - able to hit 60 mph in just under 7 seconds. And not only is it quick, but there is also some spring to the way the Prime moves. The Prius has never been a very exciting car to drive - and rightfully so, it's not meant to be. The name of the game for the Prius has always been about fuel efficiency. But in the Prime, Toyota has been able to make this version of the Prius a fun driving experience yet take nothing away from the fact that it is still fuel efficient.

When it comes to range, going with the base SE model, you can expect about 44 miles of all-electric use before the hybrid system kicks in. The XSE and XSE Premium have a slightly lower range at 39 miles. The XSE Premium I am in is rated at 48 mpg in combined city and highway use.

The fully loaded Prius Prime XSE Premium (which has an MSRP of \$43,089) was delivered to me with its battery at about 82% full. My initial trip had me going 23 miles - all of which was purely on electricity. When I reached my destination, it said I had a range of 11 miles of electrical power left. Now it was up to me if I wanted to plug it in overnight and charge it to get my full range, or leave it as-is. It's good to have choices.

As Van Halen once sang about wanting the best of both worlds (although not about cars), the Prius Prime is just that. If you have considered an EV car but have fears of range anxiety and being attached to a cord, well the hybrid system in the Prime can rest those fears. And yet if you like the idea of an EV, but still want to take a road trip (and not have to deal with having to find a place to recharge) - again the Prime solves that with its gas engine. Combine that in a vehicle that looks good and is fun to drive, and you may start to see that Toyota has really turned the Prius into a real engineering marvel.

-- Christopher A. Randazzo

By The Numbers:

2024 Toyota Prius Prime XSE Premium

Base Price:	\$39,370
Price as Tested:	\$43,089
Layout:	front-engine / front-wheel drive
Engine:	2.0 liter 16-valve 4-cylinder and electric motor
Transmission:	continuously variable transmission (CVT)
Horsepower:	220 hp
Torque:	N/A
EPA Fuel Economy:	48 mpg (44 mile range in EV mode)

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Orlando Rodriguez
(Marksman Media LLC.)
(915) 873- 0555

orlandor@spotlightnews.com