

Toyota Etios Hatch 1.5 Sprint

By  Ané Theron

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When the Toyota Etios launched in 2012 as a replacement to the much-loved Tazz, the entry-level Etios Hatch 1.5 Xi carried a R115,800 price tag.



Five years later, the same car now costs R163,800. Entry-level cars are no longer that easily affordable, and competition in this segment has become cut-throat.

Despite this fact, the Etios keeps appearing in the SA Top 10 sales list, and last year 12,768 models were sold. That Toyota badge never seems to go out of style.

Improved cabin quality

Toyota recently introduced the Etios Sprint, a replacement to the mid-range Xs variant, which will set you back R172,600. It's still not going to blow your socks off in the cosmetic department, but it's a definite improvement over the old Etios.

It's also quieter in inside, the econo-plastics feel slightly better against the fingertips, and overall it feels more solidly bolted together.

It still sports the central instrument display which isn't everyone's favourite. I am left mostly indifferent by it, but I also think it adds a smidgen of individuality to the car.



Sprightly Sprint

What the Etios does have is something that very few of its rivals do: quite a large naturally aspirated engine for a very slim and light little body. And herein lies its power, quite literally.

The Sprint (and all the other Etios models, for that matter) have a 1.5-litre, naturally aspirated engine, and a kerb weight of 930 kilogrammes, giving it a great power-to-weight ratio.

The free-reving engine (with 66kW/132Nm) is eager to get moving. Once you lift your foot from the clutch after a slick gearchange, the Sprint is prone to a little fast-paced fun and delivers good low-speed torque. Zooting around town is easy and convenient, and overtaking the road-sloths was a cinch. Even at highway speed, there was very little road noise and the Etios Sprint felt stable and planted throughout.

According to Toyota, the damping system has been tuned for better ride quality, and our unmaintained road surfaces hardly made the Sprint flinch.



The five-speed manual gearbox could do with a sixth gear, but not having to cog down when overtaking slow-coaches on the N2 was quite convenient. The steering is light but responsive and as a daily runabout, the Etios Sprint offers all the necessary mod-cons, such as air-conditioning, a four-speaker audio system with CD/USB/AUX inputs and Bluetooth, fog lamps, 15-inch alloy wheels, a height-adjustable seat, remote central locking and electric windows for the front and the rear.

The rear passengers also won't feel cramped - I had more legroom in the back of the Etios than the Mercedes-Benz GLA. The boot size is a reasonable 251 litres.

Safety

In the safety department, two front airbags, as well as ABS, EBD, and ISOFIX child seat anchorage points, help to keep occupants out of harm's way. The middle passenger in the rear also benefits from a three-point safety belt.

Some resolute rivals

Unfortunately for Toyota, the rivals come in hard and fast, some with similar output figures but more character and better safety spec, such as the Renault Sandero (from R159,900) with standard traction control. But since many people are still unnecessarily heedful of French cars (despite the Renault-Nissan Alliance), chances are they'll stick to what they know - and that's where Toyota has the upper-hand.

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course.

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