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2011 Toyota Sienna **All-new, models range from sporty to luxurious.**

Overview

Minivans have always been superior as people movers. They're easier to park and drive than SUVs, have a low step-in height for easy access, plus comfortable seating and cushy ride characteristics.

The 2011 Toyota Sienna, now in its fifth generation, has been designed for those reasons since the beginning. But for 2011, as transportation needs change, so does the Sienna.

The all-new 2011 Sienna is still very much a transportation solution for moving up to eight people. But it is now more versatile, with more flexible interior configurations, and available in a broader range of models. There are models aimed at practical transportation, models driven by luxury tastes, and even a sport model, the SE, that drives and handles more like a sports sedan.

Interior seating arrangements have been completely redesigned and can now be re-arranged more easily to carry passengers, haul cargo, or any mix of both.

Visually, the 2011 Sienna looks less like a minivan than previous generations, with lower, longer lines, and a wider stance. Toyota designers have altered the profile and stance to make the Sienna more appealing. The 2011 Sienna is based on the same platform as the prior generation, with the same wheelbase, but it has more interior room.

The 2011 Sienna is available in five grades, with seating configurations for seven or eight. Sienna is available with the 2.7-liter four-cylinder engine; higher grades are all V6-powered. Front-wheel drive is standard. All-wheel drive is available with the V6.

We found the four-cylinder a good choice. It gets a couple miles to the gallon better fuel economy and works nearly as well for everyday driving. The Sienna SE handles quite well and will be appreciated by more aggressive drivers. The SE sits lower, on a sport-tuned suspension and steering system for quicker feedback and better handling. At the other end of the spectrum is the Limited model, which glides along nice and easy, and it has steering assist that makes it easier to park.

The Toyota Sienna is made in America, designed in California, developed at Toyota's technical center in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and assembled in Indiana. It will be sold only in North America and Puerto Rico.

Model Lineup

The 2011 Toyota Sienna (\$24,260) comes standard with cloth upholstery, tri-zone manual air conditioning with air filter and rear-seat control panel, seven-passenger seating, power windows with auto up/down and jam protection in all positions, 60/40 split and stow third-row seat with one motion stow, removable second row seats with tip-up and long-slide feature, cruise control, windshield de-icer, integrated color-keyed rear spoiler, AM/FM/CD with four speakers, 17-inch aluminum alloy wheels with 235/60R17 tires. Sienna is also available with a V6 (\$25,500).

Sienna LE (\$25,345) upgrades with eight-way adjustable driver's seat with lumbar support, third-row sunshade, six-speaker audio, XM Satellite Radio, steering wheel controls for audio and telephone, Bluetooth for hands-free cell phone operation, compass and outside temperature displays, dual power sliding doors, HomeLink garage door opener. Sienna LE V6 (\$28,900) is similarly equipped. LE AWD V6 (\$30,550) adds all-wheel drive, 18-inch wheels with 235/55R18 tires.

Sienna XLE V6 (\$32,175) and XLE AWD V6 (\$34,515) upgrade with leather upholstery, automatic air conditioning, power liftgate, power moonroof, heated front seats, anti-theft system, leather-wrapped steering wheel, wood trim, towing package, power rear quarter windows.

Sienna Limited V6 (\$38,500) and Limited AWD V6 (\$39,770) get upgraded 6CD JBL audio with 10-speakers, overhead consoles, integrated antenna, chrome door handles, push-button start, smart key, deluxe mirrors, dual panel moonroof, sonar parking system, second-row captain's chairs, third-row power seats stow in floor, memory for driver's seat, four-way power front-passenger seat, leather with wood steering wheel, 18-inch wheels with 235/55R18 tires.

Sienna SE (\$30,550) features special body trim, 19-inch alloy wheels, and it comes with exclusive instrumentation and unique interior colors and trim.

Options include navigation and a rear-seat entertainment system.

Safety features include Toyota's Star Safety System with anti-lock brakes (ABS), Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), and Traction Control; the mandated tire pressure monitor system; three-point seatbelts in all seating positions with adjustable seatbelt anchors on front and second row seats, driver's seatbelt Emergency Locking Retractor (ELR), and Automatic Locking Retractors (ALR) on all other seatbelts; front seatbelts with pretensioners and force limiters; driver and front passenger Active Headrests; driver and front passenger airbags with Advanced Airbag System; driver and front passenger seat-mounted side airbags; driver knee airbag; three-row side curtain airbags; side impact beams in front and sliding side doors; LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children); child protector sliding door locks; jam protection for power windows. Optional all-wheel drive enhances safety in adverse conditions. The Pre-Collision System is optional with Dynamic Radar Cruise Control. Vehicle Dynamics Integrated Management System (VDIM), Hill Assist Control (HAC), Safety Connect, and front and rear sonar are optional or included on premium models. All of this stuff is a very good idea.

All prices are Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Prices (MSRP), which may change without notice at any time. Prices do not include destination charges.

Walkaround

The new 2011 Toyota Sienna doesn't look exactly like a minivan, because a number of classic minivan visual cues have been eliminated. It has a wider stance, with broader flared shoulders, and a more compelling, contemporary front face with sophisticated, highly angular headlamps. The lights have projector lamps and halogen high beams combined in a compact, slender design.

From the side, the 2011 Sienna looks much sleeker overall, and less boxy in appearance than previously. The track for the sliding rear doors is completely concealed, so the rear doors look like they belong on a sedan or crossover SUV. The rear windows are shaped in a tapered trapezoid and inclined inward like a sedan, again contradicting the standard boxy minivan look.

The rear has been designed with a low, wide bumper and a roof spoiler that hides the rear wiper, for a stronger, cleaner appearance. LED tail and stop lamps are used, which illuminate more quickly and consume less power.

Overall, the exterior looks cleaner and sleeker, and it is. Aerodynamic work, including underbody covers to help manage airflow, has reduced the coefficient of drag to 0.306.

There are quite a few differences from model to model. Each has a distinctive grille, ranging from the sporty mesh grille on the SE to the chrome four-slot arrangement on the Limited. 17-, 18-, and 19-inch wheels are used depending on the model and options. SE, XLE and Limited models have integrated front fog lamps, and Limited has HID headlamps as an option. The SE has dark chrome accents around the lights and smoked headlight covers.

The Sienna SE gets special styling cues. The front has a more aggressive appearance. Side skirting visually lowers the vehicle and smoked headlights and taillights make a distinctive statement. Aerodynamic sculpting hugs the standard 19-inch alloy wheels. The SE sits lower, on a sport-tuned suspension.

Interior Features

The 2011 Sienna interior is distinctly modernistic. From the driver and passenger perspective, the cockpit uses flowing lines and round controls to achieve a sense of unified, integrated design. Prominently visible at the base of the center stack is a shape, something like a tadpole, that tapers laterally toward the passenger, to create the feeling that there is more room to share. To our eye, it's modern and effective, preventing the center stack from looking like a pile of squared-off rectangular boxes. Instead, the design suggests shared space and control areas, in a freshly contemporary atmosphere.

Design aside, the center stack contains the usual controls, with the message center at the top, the audio system just below, the climate control system below that, and storage and convenience features, such as cupholders and 12-volt plugs, at the lowest level. The shifter is located on the dash, closest to the driver, freeing center console space for storage.

There are three instrument designs, but the standard analog system uses bright blue numbering with red needles. In all three designs, a large speedometer and tach are combined with fuel and temperature gauges. The automatic transmission range and odometer are displayed on the LCD in the center of the meter, and an ECO-drive light has been added to indicate economical driving. The dash materials and cloth upholstery look and feel nice enough, although the upper pieces of the dashboard, while attractively textured, turn out to be hard plastic.

The steering wheel, padded and contoured, has buttons for audio system control on the left and Bluetooth phone control on the left. The wheel tilts and telescopes.

The front seats are passenger-car comfortable. They are six-way adjustable on the base Sienna model, and power eight-way adjustable on all other models, with memory available for the driver on Limited models. The front passenger seats are four-way, with power adjustability available on the Limited. The Sienna seats now travel about an inch farther, forward and back, compared to the previous generation, and have longer, wider cushions and adjustable armrests. Leather-trimmed and heated seats are standard on the XLE and Limited.

Second-row comfort was obviously a design priority. The second-row seats are mounted on very long sliders, 25.6 inches in length, so they can be moved very far forward or very far back, depending on the way the interior needs to be configured for people or cargo. With the seats at adjusted to the limit, a walk-in isle is created, big enough for an adult to walk through to help a

child or an older passenger. With the second row seats adjusted all the way forward, walk-in access to the third row becomes possible.

Eight-passenger models use an arrangement that splits seating in a 40/20/40 proportion. That makes the second-row center seat small relative to the two outside seats, probably only actually useful for smaller people. When not in use, the center seat can be removed and stowed in a specially-designed compartment in the back, converting the second row to captain's chairs with room in between. The standard chairs are quite comfortable, but there is also an optional Lounge Seating feature available with Limited that equips the second-row captain's chairs with extended footrests.

On certain models, the back half of the center console can be extended rearward about a foot into the passenger area. With the console moved rearward, second-row passengers have more easily reached cupholders and another handy storage option.

Third-row seats are split 60/40, and fold flat with one touch. The third-row hip point is now two inches further back, which translates into leg-room for the third row occupants, and the seats recline a bit as well.

Versatility was another design priority, along with the ability to reconfigure the interior for different mixes of people and cargo. To convert from carrying people to carrying cargo, the Sienna's third-row seats easily fold flat and, when the second-row seats are folded far forward, 117 cubic feet of cargo area becomes available. With the second-row seats removed altogether, cargo area expands to 150 cubic feet. Even with just the third-row seats folded flat, there is 87 cubic feet of stowage behind the second row.

An oversized screen for the entertainment system is available for the Limited models that's large enough to split into two screens in case rear-seat occupants want entertainment from two different sources. That allows for playing a video game on half of the screen, and showing a movie on the other. Wireless headphones are available. The screen is unusually large, big enough for third-row passengers to see.

Tri-zone automatic climate control is standard on Sienna, LE and SE models, as is a cabin air filter that prevents pollen and dust from entering the vehicle.

The navigation system, a voice-activated, touch-screen system, is available on LE and Limited models. It supports an integrated backup camera with two views, and the 10-speaker JBL audio system, plus Bluetooth-capable audio devices. The system allows the user to control the source device using the car's steering wheel controls to play, pause and seek.

Toyota Safety Connect includes automatic collision notification, an emergency assistance button with 24-hour roadside assistance and the ability to locate a stolen vehicle by GPS. It comes standard on all models, with a one-year trial subscription.

A sonar parking assist system, with four ultrasonic sensors, is available on Sienna XLE models. The system sounds progressively as an object becomes closer to the vehicle. A similar system, with six sensors, is standard on Limited.

Driving Impressions

We spent a day in Laguna Niguel, California, testing the new Sienna. Our driving routes varied, taking us along the scenic Pacific Coast highway, through Dana Point harbor, and up the notoriously winding Ortega Highway. We started with a four-cylinder LE, moved into a LE V6, then an SE V6, and finally, a Limited with everything on it. Each model has a slightly different character, with the SE and Limited being the most distinctive.

The Sienna has electric power steering, which allowed engineers to tune the steering response for the different models. The Sienna SE has the tightest, most accurate and responsive steering of the models, along with the best handling and the best chassis control. The Limited model had the most power assist in the steering, and the chassis was tuned for comfort. Sienna LE and XLE models are somewhere in between, with steering and chassis priorities balanced 50/50 between comfort and handling.

Of the Sienna models we drove, the SE is by far the most appealing from a driving dynamics point of view. It steers exceptionally well for a minivan, more like a sports sedan. It corners without much body roll, with a nice crisp turn-in and a clean, stable track through the bends. This responsive personality is achieved with not too much ride tradeoff in the process. The 19-inch wheels and lower profile tires do allow a bit more road feel into the cabin, but it's not annoying, and the extra confidence allowed us to drive mountain roads at higher speeds in a relaxed manner. Frankly, we wish all minivans handled this well. We're not sure if a good-handling minivan is likely to become a major player in the marketplace, but if it is, the SE is a home run. We noticed the brakes become a little touchy when we hustled the SE down the Ortega Highway, but they don't lack for stopping power. All in all, we'd say the SE is a fun and responsive car to operate, in an attractive package. Drivers who drive aggressively will like the SE.

We also drove a four-cylinder LE and a V6 LE to get a sense of the difference between the two engines. The verdict: driven around town, and without a full load, there is not much difference. The four-cylinder is definitely peppy and powers the Sienna well around town and through traffic. It has slightly lower final drive gearing, but shows 2000 rpm at 60 mph, which is not appreciably different from the V6. There is a little more vibration coming from the four-cylinder when you ask it to work hard, but other than that, the Sienna drives well with either engine. We would expect the V6 to be the smoother engine at highway speeds, with better passing power, but we think the two would be reasonably comparable the rest of the time.

The 2.7-liter four-cylinder makes 187 horsepower, but delivers its torque peak at 4100 rpm, about 600 rpm earlier than the V6, so it's quite driveable. In terms of fuel economy, with EPA ratings of 19/26/22 City/Highway/Combined, the four-cylinder is about two mpg better than the V6 overall, and one mpg better around town.

We did not have a chance to drive an all-wheel-drive Sienna AWD, but it has the same system as in the Toyota Highlander SUV, which biases torque based on information from wheel sensors. When wheel slip is detected, torque distribution is adjusted accordingly, providing better grip on icy or snowy roads. A key difference is that AWD models have run-flat tires and no spare. The tires, specially developed by Bridgestone, offer improved safety and performance in the event of a puncture through unique cooling ribs on the sidewall. They are designed to provide the capability to safely drive to a repair location. We would expect that they would ride a little harder than regular tires, and wear a little differently because of their unique construction and rubber compound. Our conclusion is that the AWD would be worth the investment in areas where weather conditions demand superior traction, but perhaps not attractive for owners who don't live in four-season climates.

Our last test loop of the day was in a Sienna Limited, which is the top of the line. It has the nicest interior; undeniably comfortable and well equipped. We immediately noticed the steering was tuned for ease of operation, with very high levels of power assist. That made the Limited easy to park and maneuver at low speeds, but it also required more attention to keep in the center of the lane driving quickly down a mountain road. The Limited is the kind of luxury wagon we would drive with hands in our lap, steering with the wrist, just taking it nice and easy.

All Sienna models have huge rear doors for easy entry. Access to the second and third row is easier than any minivan we can recall, because the door is so large, and headroom is good.

Also, because the second row seats are on long tracks, it's possible to move them all the way forward to access the third row, or all the way back to walk into the passenger area. We think it would be possible for an average-size person to step in with a car seat, fasten it down and walk out, without having to kneel or crawl around.

Pretty much, all the Sienna models we drove were well insulated against wind, engine, and road noise. Toyota engineers used every trick in the book, padding, phase-shifting techniques, noise cancellation, sound absorbing materials and better engineered seals in the doors, among others, to keep noise to an absolute minimum.

Summary

The current Sienna was designed as a 2004 model, with minor changes in 2007. Since then, there have been momentous changes in the way cars are equipped, the way they look and handle, and the safety equipment that has evolved. With the 2011 Sienna, Toyota has designed all the latest advances into the car, and introduces new features never offered on any Toyota.

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