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Wheels: New Toyota Verso Revives Multi-Purpose Vehicles

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Toyota's economical new Verso Icon MPV offers ample storage space and environment-friendly gas mileage.

Editor's note: Wheels is a new section featuring car reviews.

There are few vehicles that will transport three generations of the same family. But MPVs (multi-purpose vehicles) solve this difficulty. Traditionally, however, there is one drawback, which that is that they are environmentally unfriendly gas guzzlers. This is why Toyota previously scrapped its popular Previa, much to the sighs of many Russians.

Now, it has revisited the MPV with the introduction of the compact yet versatile Verso.

With its three rows of seats, the Toyota Verso Icon was the perfect solution for the Saunders family when my wife Caroline wanted to treat her parents to a day out but didn't want them to drive.

Toyota Verso Icon

Price from: 820,000 rubles
Top speed: 185 kph
0- 100 kph: 11.7 seconds
Economy: up to 21.25 kpl

Source: Toyota

We drove to her parents with Harriett (2) and Heidi (three weeks) both in their car seats in the rear. Nothing unusual there. When we collected Caroline's parents, Harriett and Heidi were swiftly shoved in the trunk. Not quite how it sounds because the third row of seats fitted snugly into the floor of the trunk. They were simply pulled up for use. Initially it seemed that space was tight in the rear but then I discovered that the second row slid forward in the same way as the front.

Access to the third row was simple because each seat in the second row folded forward with the pull of an easy-to-use lever. There were only six of us and the Verso could fit seven, which meant that the middle seat in the second row was redundant. Great then that it could be folded down flush to give a little extra room. We were all pleasantly surprised with how user-friendly and versatile the seating arrangements were in the Verso. The designers have clearly thought long and hard over the best use of space and they have done a good job.

Passengers in the second row benefited from folding tables, which came in very handy when we all decided to eat our picnic in the car because it was far too cold to brave the bitter cold outside.

We parked up by the sea and enjoyed the view. Harriett sat on daddy's lap and tried her hand at steering, operating the sat nav and the stereo. No matter what car she travels in, she always swiftly finds the switch for the hazard lights, which inevitably start flashing. It wasn't long before her little fingers found their way to the button for the retractable wing mirrors, too. This proved to be huge fun for the little rascal, who earned herself a good tickle.

The driver of such a vehicle is always keen to know what his passengers are doing, so a helpful folding panoramic mirror can be found above the rearview mirror; a very useful tool indeed — I could even see my daughters in the third row — Harriett drawing on the window, bless her, an artist in the making.

Cubbyholes abound for all the family junk. When the third row of seats is in operation, trunk space is drastically reduced and so it is helpful to find a sizeable hidden space in the floor of the trunk, large enough for a reasonable size bag, as you can see from the test drive videos.

The 1.6-liter engine can be a little lethargic, and I had trouble selecting second gear — the six-speed box was not as smooth as I would prefer. However, the brakes were sharp and precise stopping us immediately when a bumbling Sunday-afternoon driver chose to go

all the way round a roundabout without indicating. The cruise control could be trusted to keep the set speed no matter how steep the incline.

Despite its capabilities inside, the Verso felt a relatively small car to drive, proving fairly easy to park and helped by the addition of the rear parking camera that appeared in the media center in the middle of the dash. The one thing I couldn't come to terms with, though, was the position of the speedometer and rev counter. They were not directly in front of the driver as usual but to the left.

The Verso benefits from all the practicality of the old Toyota Previa and Renault Espace but in a more user-friendly and compact package, better suited to the demands of today's families — A vehicle that can truly transport three generations of one family in relative comfort.

Other car reviews can be found at testdrives.biz

Video of the test drive.

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