



Toyota Aygo I go to Rome

Toyota has taken quite an adventure. The company introduces a kind of car with which they have had no experience up until now. Toyota is renowned for its reliability and advanced technology, but not in particular for its exciting models. Let alone that people buy Toyota for its cool image. Still, Toyota is trying to be young, cool and dynamic with its new Aygo. With this smallest ever Toyota, the manufacturer promises the same reliability as the more expensive models. Autozine drove it through Rome to see whether all of this turned out to be true.

It all starts fairly calm, easy and a little bit boring. That's what is called 'the calm before the storm'. A presentation on the Aygo is given at the brand new complex centre of Toyota Italy. Here the information is shared that the basis of the car is the same as the soon to be expected Peugeot 107 and Citroën C1. These are the brands that have a lot of experience with compact trendy cars. Because of Toyota's almost legendary reputation for reliability, the Japanese manufacturer is responsible for production of all three of them.

Only the basis of the three cars is the same, for every brand provides their car with its own face, its own outfit and of course its own price tag. Here too Toyota wants to distinguish itself not least with a extraordinary way of financing: the 'pre-paid car'. Finally Toyota mentions that the Aygo is built in a way that makes recovery easy, which helps to keep the insurance premium down.



Ready for take off

So far the presentation, time for the test drive. Keeping the last point of the presentation in mind, a confident course is set for the most chaotic city of Europe: Rome. We share this drive with Daniël, an employee of Toyota Italy who, in his role as the navigator, loves to show off his country. Luggage for two just fits in the back, and then the test-team is ready to go.

The 3-cylinder 1 litre petrol engine is ready as well. Importantly so, for this is the only source of power available to the Aygo for the time being. A diesel engine will follow at

the beginning of 2006. Three cylinders may seem too few or inadequate and that is what it sounds like when the engine is started. Three cylinders however are also a guarantee for a lively character and a remarkably low fuel consumption. Not unimportant either is the CO₂-emissions, the greenhouse gas, of this engine is exceptionally low. Besides that the performance is good, a good pace is achieved quickly and once the engine is properly warmed up the car turns out to be remarkably quiet.

M-MT

Only when arriving in the mountainous area around the many lakes in this part of the country does it become apparent for the first time that the Aygo belongs to the cheapest cars on the market. The engine has to work hard to overcome the hills. Steering through the many hairpin bends is a lot of fun and road holding is good. Even when the test driver makes a mistake in one of the bends, there is enough back-up available to escape with a whole skin. This is called "Active safety". Passive safety can be found in the two airbags, with the option of increasing to six units.



Apart from the engine, the "mutli mode transmission", an extra on this test vehicle, also struggles on the hills. "M-MT" is a gearbox that is operated by a robot. This is much simpler (read: cheaper) than a conventional automatic gearbox. Furthermore, the M-MT is more economical.

In the mountains as well as on the motorway every time the robot changes gears the Aygo annoyingly loses momentum, which quickly forces a preference to manual operation. Even then it takes a bit of practice to find the next gear (a bit to the front) or the previous one (a bit to the back) at the exact right moment to keep the car moving smoothly. Extraordinarily, the M-MT in automatic-mode brakes on the engine when going downhill.

All roads lead to ...

"Daniël, we have seen enough of the lakes, churches and idyllic villages. Where is Rome?". Easier said than done, because like a true Italian the guide hardly speaks any English and yours truly unfortunately does not speak Italian. "Rome, Roma, Colloseum, Pope". This seems to work, for the instructions given lead to wider through roads. At the same time the traffic density increases with every driven mile.

As in all of Italy, the same applies for secondary roads: the Highway Code and traffic rules are merely a suggestion. Improvise is the key. It seems like a recipe for complete chaos, but with some common sense and flexibility it surprisingly seems to work. And with some good pointers from an experienced Italian it quickly becomes clear where the Aygo can nip in between or when it is more sensible to hit the brakes. And the Aygo does the latter nicely. Even ABS and electronic distribution of braking power are standard.



The suburbs around rush hour are an unprecedented chaos. Scooters overtake on the left and right putting their lives on the line. Teenagers in the streets seem to notice the Aygo and are following the car with their eyes. Passengers of a minibus are even making appreciative hand gestures (they have seen the foreign license plates). Although Toyota wants us to believe differently, we like the look of the 3-door test vehicle better than the 5-door. Besides, the test vehicle is the "Sport"-version with mirrors and door handles in the same colour paint. Quite a nice detail, although not visible from the outside, is the remote rev meter that is placed on the (adjustable) steering column with a little arm.

Rome

Dusk is setting in when the city centre is reached. The first stop for every tourist is the Colosseum. The guide points to the police van that is supposed to keep unwanted photographers at bay. The trick is to drive away when the police van approaches and then to return to the same spot when the police have left. The extremely tight turning circle and the clear view from inside the car makes manoeuvring through bollards and gates remarkably easy. Repeat this procedure three times and the first photography session is a fact. "Phoyota di Toyota , is bella".



The Aygo even feels much more at home in the heaving traffic chaos than on the through roads and the autostrada. The best way in cities like this is: take a run, merge in with the masses and try to come out first. If in doubt: keep one foot on the accelerator and one hand on the horn. Despite the lack of understanding of each other's languages "Schumacher, Schumacher" isn't lost in translation while the Aygo rushes along the now orange lit boulevards.

The chassis has no difficulties whatsoever with brick, cobbles, drain covers or holes that make up the road surface. Even in the rain the Aygo remains perfectly steerable when purposefully trying to find the limits. We are having fun and that is exactly what the Aygo strives for. "La Libri di Tuti Capi di Tuti" as the next destination? Sure, whatever. "Si", and the next tourist attraction, at this time of night completely abandoned, is paid a visit. The restaurant can wait. AyGo Rome, WeGo Rome!.



Conclusion

It seems contradictory. Toyota produces little exciting but very good, reliable and sensible cars. Now it seems like the brand has almost lost its faith and throws itself wholeheartedly at the smallest segment with a trendy and above all very affordable city car.

The design is in particular trendy, but so is the interior. Unfortunately this interior is not always very practical, for especially the 3-doors version has little room on the backseat or the boot. The space in the front is fine. In busy cities the Aygo is very manoeuvrable, easy to park and therefore more practical than many a large car. Outside of the city the Aygo scores quite well too. The performance and comfort are excellent for a little car.

Finally, looking at the comprehensive outfit, the Aygo is affordable too. That means the smart 3-cylinder technology guarantees not only lots of pleasure and good performances, but also low costs in day-to-day use. Toyota's reliability guarantees that this pleasure will last for a very long time (Ivo Kroone). ■



Specifications

Toyota Aygo 1.0 12v VVT-i Sport

Size and weight

Length	341 cm
Width	162 cm
Height	147 cm
Wheelbase	234 cm
Kerb weight	790 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	35 l
Luggage space	139 l

Engine and performance

Capacity	998 cc
Cylinders / valves	3/4
Max power	68 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Max torque	93 Nm @ 3600 rpm
Drive	voorwielen
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	14.2 secs
Top speed	157 km/h
Average mileage	4.6 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5.5 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.1 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	109 gr / km



Price

Price	£ 7,730
Price base model	£ 6,730