

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

TOYOTA LANDCRUISER 70 SERIES

LARGE UTES

The Toyota LandCruiser has been the Australian bush's favourite workhorse since Leslie Thies (later Sir Leslie) introduced the first Land Cruisers to Australia in the 1970s. Evolution, not revolution, is the name of the game.



Toyota isn't stupid: you don't get to be world number one by making a lot of mistakes. Toyota could no doubt make a replacement for the current 70 Series that had all mod cons, but the company hasn't gone down that route. Instead, the 70 Series has been kept as simple as possible, with electronics only where they're necessary.

The latest machine has adopted an electronically controlled V8 turbo-intercooled diesel, because an electronic engine was necessary to meet Euro IV emissions levels. A plus for the new engine was oil drain periods of 10,000km, out from the six cylinder's 5000km.

The 4.5-litre V8 is under-stressed in the 78/79 Series, putting out 151kW at 3400rpm, with 430Nm in the 1200-3200rpm band. As we saw when a twin-turbo version was introduced in the 200 Series wagon range, the engine is capable of much more output. However, considering the ancient heritage of the 78/79, the few upgrades made to the chassis and suspension, a mere three-star ANCAP crashworthiness rating and the absence of any stability control or even ABS brakes, the 151kW/430Nm spec' is just about right.

The 75-78 Series 'veed' front end with its small grille opening was widened to accept the V8 engine with its much larger radiator. The front axle track has had to go up 80mm in the case of the split-rim-wheel Workmate version and 120mm on the aluminium-wheel GX and GXL versions. The V8 model's front track is therefore now 95mm wider than the track of the leaf-sprung rear axle and it shows: drive behind the new vehicle and you can be forgiven for thinking that it's 'crabbing' down the road.

The rest of the machine is virtually unchanged, but the age of the original layout, dating back to the all leaf-sprung 75 Series shows.

At a very high retail price the LandCruiser 79 Series GXL looks decidedly underdone: no air conditioning, a tiny, open oddments tray, cheap-looking cloth seats and carpet, a squinty interior light and a 1980s metal and plasto dashboard. The only concession to the 21st century seems to be an MP3-compatible CD player.

The interior remained virtually unchanged from the previous 78/79 Series, until the introduction of SRS airbags in 2010, when the dashboard and steering wheel shapes were revised. Along with that came a Bluetooth-equipped sound system that's iPod and Android compatible.

On Road in the 78 Series

Driving the LandCruiser is a journey into the past, but traditionalists love it.

Ride is...er... lively over rough surfaces as the coil-sprung front end and leaf-sprung rear cope with their different reactions. Handling is weird, because you have a coil-sprung, wide-track front axle with a relatively low roll centre in combination with a narrow-track, leaf-sprung rear end with a much higher roll centre.



People who ask why Toyota didn't give the V8 more grunt (it's up only 29kW and 50Nm on the old turbo six) haven't driven the latest version on something loose or slippery. Also, the old driveline is largely preserved, with the same gearing, so there are limitations on how much torque it can handle.

Braking is powerful, but heavy-footers need to remember there's no ABS.

The engine is a smooth performer, with ample flexibility and that's just as well, because the clunky transmission is well past its use-by date. Fortunately, it's easy to drive the unladen 78 using first, third then fifth, but for smooth, more economical towing a nice six-speeder with closer gaps and a taller overdrive ratio is long overdue. An auto option perhaps, or is that too much to expect?

Seating in the GXL's bucket chairs proved quite comfortable on our Sydney-Brisbane and return journey, but we did miss cruise control and some in-cab noise mitigation. Induction noise through the snorkel and wind noise around the edges of what is a slightly streamlined brick drowned out Mozart.

When towing the Conqueror camper's one-tonne weight the 'Cruiser's performance was hardly affected, but the lively rear leaves transmitted dynamic inputs from the trailer. After-market suspension specialists can moderate the standard suspension behaviour.

Vision of the trailer through the rear window and the old-fashioned flat mirrors was OK, but surely Toyota can improve on door-mounted frames that let the mirrors jerk out of alignment whenever a door is opened and shut.

The V8 can pull taller, 3.91:1 final drives than the previous 4.11:1 diffs, but engine revs at legal cruising speeds are still too high (2600rpm at 110km/h) so fuel consumption is at best 12.5L/100km . Our tow test saw fuel consumption climb to 16L/100km.

Off-road Fun

Proper deep-reduction gearing, the fat-tyred GXL rubber and optional front and rear diff locks made the 'Cruiser extremely competent off-road. Wherever it could get grip it would go. After a drop in tyre pressures of 78 Series and trailer the combo flitted over soft beach sand quite happily.

An 'idle-up' switch increases idling revs, primarily to improve cold-start warm-up times, but makes a substitute hand-throttle for rough-terrain driving. At around 1500rpm the big V8 allows the 'Cruiser to idle over most obstacles.

The factory-fitted diff locks worked quickly and effectively in demanding conditions, unlike the older Toyota designs that took too long to engage. They're not a retro-fit possibility, because the axle housings are different.



Previous Models

Toyota resales ensure you'll pay plenty for a used 70 Series.

Bush Modifications

Toyota 70 Series rear leaves sag quickly when loaded, so an after-market suspension is essential. The factory-fitted diff locks give excellent traction, but a pair of after-market, driver-controlled diff locks can be fitted to those vehicles that don't have factory locks. The Toyota factory locks cannot be retro-fitted, because the diff lock axle housings are different.



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