

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

TOYOTA PRADO

MEDIUM WAGONS

The post-2010 Prado range has 14 variants, with the choice of three and five door body styles, petrol and diesel engines, six-speed manual and five-speed auto transmissions and six model grades.

The engine choices are 4.0-litre, 202kW/381Nm dual VVT-i petrol and 3.0-litre, 127kW/410Nm turbocharged common-rail direct-injection diesel. Both engines can be matched to six-speed manual or five-speed sequential-shift automatic transmissions.



Standard equipment on all Prados includes seven airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), All-terrain Traction Control (A-TRC), ABS with Electronic Brake-force Distribution (EBD) and Brake Assist (BA), air-conditioning, cruise control, smart entry and smart start, tilt and telescopic steering column adjustment, 220-volt rear accessory socket, Bluetooth TM mobile telephone capability, USB auxiliary input and iPod ® control, side-mirror-mounted indicators, aluminium wheels, conversation mirror, UV-cut glass, ventilated coolbox in the centre console and a minimum 2500kg towing capacity (three door Prados are rated for 3000kg).

Automatic GX has the added feature of Hill-Start Assist Control (HAC) and Downhill Assist Control (DAC), while an option pack adds third-row seats and extends the side-curtain SRS airbags to the third row.

Prado GXL grade has the added features over GX of standard-fitment third-row seats and a third-row side curtain-shield airbag, climate-control three-zone air conditioning, rear-view camera, rear parking sensors, 4.2-inch multi-information display, wider alloy wheels and tyres, steering wheel audio controls, alarm system, front fog lamps, roof rails, side steps, premium steering wheel, shift lever knob and handbrake lever, roller-blind-type tonneau cover, sun visor extensions, FM diversity antenna and two additional cup holders.

VX grade has the additional features over GXL of new electronically modulated KDSS suspension, 18-inch aluminium wheels, automatic on/off HID projector headlamps with steering-linked Adaptive Front-light System (AFS) and headlamp jet washers, rain-sensing intermittent wipers, leather-accented seat and door trim, heated front seats, power adjustment for the tilt and telescopic steering column, power-folding third-row seat, front parking sensors, nine-speaker audio with CD multi-changer, privacy glass, time-delay auto-cut headlights, electro-chromatic interior mirror, illuminated entry system, illuminated step and step cover, chrome interior door handles, luggage utility rails and multi-information display with steering wheel switch.

Top-of-the-range Kakadu grade adds CRAWL control, four-camera Multi-Terrain Monitor (MTM), electronic rear differential lock, Toyota Adaptive Variable Suspension (AVS), height-adjustable and auto-levelling rear air suspension, Multi-Terrain Select (MTS) traction-control switch, moonroof, touch-screen satellite navigation, 14-speaker premium Pioneer audio system with DVD multi-changer, rear-seat entertainment, refrigerated cool-box, leather-accented and wood-look steering wheel, wood and metal-look

instrument panel, and key-linked driver's seat and steering column memory pack. In addition, Kakadu has a rear-seat entertainment system with three wireless headphones, two headphone jacks and AV input.

Kakadu also has the advanced safety-pack combined option of Pre-Crash safety System (PCS) and radar cruise control, with steering wheel-mounted controls.

Vehicles with the Kakadu safety option pack do not have CRAWL control, electronic locking rear differential, MTS and one of the MTM cameras.



The Prado's aged four-cylinder turbo-diesel is pretty much past its use-by date, even with the more efficient positioning of the intercooler in front of the radiator rather than on top of the engine.

It feels overworked and fuel consumption on test was a disappointing 11L/100km when running solo and around 15L/100km when towing a 1500kg trailer.

Seat comfort was fine on a 2000km round trip over varying road surfaces and noise levels were commendably low. Vision through the screen and large mirrors was excellent and the rear vision camera was a boon when reversing solo and when coupling.

We found all the controls intuitive to operate and the sound system provided good quality reproduction.



The additional gear on the very expensive Kakadu version isn't worth it for most buyers. Much of the electronic wizardry is a copy of the system introduced by Land Rover in the Discovery 3 six years ago, but the control switches for the suspension and traction variations are spread around the dashboard and on the steering wheel, so familiarisation takes quite some time.

On road, the variable damper settings had a noticeable effect on ride quality, but the air-suspended rear end is, sadly, no better than its Grande predecessor's. The back end bottoms out easily on sharp bumps and lacks the suppleness of the cheaper SX's coil springs. It does, however, keep ride height constant when a modest trailer is connected, but heavy ball loads cause the air spring pressures to rise, affecting ride quality.

The CRAWL function is a boon in difficult off-road conditions and the camera view of the track in front of the vehicle can be useful when cresting sharp rises, but we're not sure what happens to the camera view when a 'roo bar is fitted.

Previous Models



The Toyota Prado has been with us since 1996 and has two body changes: one in 2003 and the most recent in 2009.

The Prado that was launched in Australia in 1996 had already been on sale in other markets in three-door and five-door guises since 1993. The 90-series was launched here as a five-door, with independent semi-strut front suspension, coil-sprung live rear axle, full-time 4WD and a choice of two petrol engines.

The eight-seat (third row strictly for small children) Prado V6 came in four grades: RV, GXL, VX and Grande. Initial engines were petrol only: a 2.7-litre, four-cylinder 3RZ-FE and a 3.4 litre, V6 5VZ-FE.

Although HiLux diesels were offered in overseas market Prados the Australian market was deemed to require more performance than was then available.

In August 1999 Prado V6 models were upgraded, with split-folding, 40:60 second-row seats with three head restraints, three child restraint anchorage points and a 40mm increase in cushion length.



Prado V6 RV and GXL retained a vertical black grille, while the VX and Grande models had a horizontal-bar, chrome grille. Prado GXL, VX and Grande had front fog lamps as standard equipment.

The luxury grade VX and Grande's additional features were six-speaker audio, increased use of wood grain look and illuminated vanity mirrors.

In March 2000 Toyota finally announced a three-litre, turbocharged and inter-cooled, 1KZ-TE diesel engine option in the Prado range, with 96kW of power at 3600rpm and 343Nm of torque at 2000rpm. The three equipment grades were RV, GXL and TX, which was exclusively turbo-diesel.

In October 2000 a turbo-diesel automatic driveline was released.

Prado Turbo-diesel TX and Grande automatic models had the active safety features of vehicle stability control (VSC) and four-wheel-drive traction control (4WD-TRAC).

The 120-series Prado was launched in February 2003 as the successor to the market-leading model and racked up even more market share. Fuel tank capacity was a class leading 180 litres.

The 2003 Prado was larger than its predecessor, but preserved its general mechanical layout – particularly in the case of the turbo-diesel models.

All models had SRS airbags and pretensioner front seat belts, eight seats with lap/sash belts and head restraints, but the front seats of GX and GXL models lacked seat height and lumbar adjustment. Toyota made Prado customers spend more than seventy grand to get seats with height and lumbar adjustment.

In 2004 Toyota added a six-speed manual and five-speed auto to the Prado range, but only behind the four-litre V6 petrol engine. The diesels retained the existing five-speed manual and four-speed automatic transmissions until late 2006.



An anomaly was that the 2005 HiLux had a more advanced common rail diesel than the Prado, which had to make do with the older indirect-injection engine until late 2006.

Also in 2004 Toyota released a new VX-grade, with V6 or turbo-diesel powertrains, between the GXL and Grande equipment grades.

Prado VX had an electronically controlled automatic transmission, front-seat mounted side airbags, front and second-row curtain airbags, Driver Assist Technology, including hill-start assist control, active traction control (TRC), vehicle stability control (VSC) and downhill assist control (DAC).

Comfort items above GXL grade included dual front zone climate control air conditioning, clean air filter and a rear cooler. Prado VX also had electrically adjustable driver's seat lumbar support, driver's seat vertical height adjustment, adjustable front head restraints and telescopic steering column adjustment.

In addition, Prado VX had suede-look seat and door trim, wood grain-look dashboard features and door trim, roof rails, privacy glass and illuminated driver and passenger vanity mirrors with covers.

In November 2006 the HiLux's three-litre, common-rail, 1KD-FTV direct-injection engine finally found its way into the Prado, delivering 127kW at 3400rpm (up from 96kW at 3600rpm) with peak torque of 410Nm at 1600 - 2800rpm (up from 343Nm at 2000rpm).

Transmissions available with the new engine gained an extra ratio - a six-speed manual and an electronically controlled five-speed automatic with gated shift.

In September 2007 Toyota added a new standard-grade turbo-diesel manual or automatic transmission model to the Prado line-up and a leather-covered steering wheel with audio controls became standard across all five Prado grades.

Two option packs were available for the standard-grade model: the first one offering ABS anti-skid brakes, cruise control and a leather gearshift lever; and the second option pack for the auto model included Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Traction Control (TRC), climate control air conditioning and an exterior chrome package.

The 2007 Prado Grande was now fitted with a rear view camera.

That's pretty much how the Prado remained until late 2009, when the re-skinned, current-shape 150-series was released.



Mechanical Issues

Prados have suffered from front end troubles - recalls were issued – and weak automatic transmissions that hated heavy towing.

Most owners haven't used the twin fuel tanks, so check that the transfer system works and that there's no sludge in the reserve tank.

Inner mudguard panels suffer from cracking caused by chassis flex (cured in the latest Prado, which has stiffening members in the chassis) – particularly in the case of hard-worked examples and those fitted with an under-bonnet second battery.

Bush Modifications

The Prado drove through a constant 4WD system, with a manually lockable centre differential. The only traction aid in the most popular GXL model was a rear axle limited slip diff centre. Top-shelf models came with traction control, which worked very effectively.

The Prado's engine bay is well laid out, with a pre-drilled space for a second battery box and a fuel filter that's easily reached. The air intake is in the RHS mudguard space and is well protected from splashes, provided the inner mudguard fitment is intact. This plastic infill is often disturbed when front bars are fitted.

The intercooler is fed air through a double-skinned bonnet, doing away with the need for a bonnet air scoop. The Prado is basically well specified for serious bush work, given that it comes with up to 180 litres of fuel capacity, has traditional chassis plus body construction, a long-travel, live rear axle and legendary bush dealer support.

The starting point for a bush-capable Prado would be a GXL, not the VX or Grande. 'Frills' that include leather upholstery, a sunroof, air rear suspension and variable-rate dampers are out of place in the scrub.

We'd take off the side steps and fit after-market suspension that would cost a little in ride quality, but would preserve the already limited belly clearance with a load on board.

We'd slot either a Detroit Soft Locker or an ARB Air Locker into the back axle.

There's space for a second battery under the Prado's bonnet, to power a fridge and to back up the starting battery. There are also several winches and winch bars to choose from, if self-recovery ability is needed.

Don't fit heavy auxiliary batteries and oversized winches to the front of any Prado. Body panels and chassis crack if too much weight is placed over the front end.

Auxiliary batteries need to be lightweight AGM types – expensive – and winches should be adequate, but not over-sized. You can save seven kilograms of winch weight by using plasma rope rather than wire cable.



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