

4WD BUYERS GUIDE

TOYOTA PRADO THREE-DOOR

SMALL WAGONS



[Click here to watch Toyota Prado Three Door video test](#)

Toyota must have different market research from Mitsubishi, which discontinued its reintroduced three-door Pajero in 2011. The first Toyota Prado three-door model joined the lineup in early 2010.

The post-2010 Prado range had 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. However, the three-door Prado came only with turbo-diesel engine and automatic transmission, five seats and in SX and ZR equipment levels.

Standard equipment on all Prados was: 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.



The Prado SX three-door had almost identical equipment levels to the five-door GX, including Hill-Start Assist Control (HAC) and Downhill Assist Control (DAC), but scored an additional 500kg towing capacity, up to 3000kg.

The three-door ZR has CRAWL control, four-camera Multi Terrain Monitor (MTM), Multi Terrain Select (MTS), electronic locking rear differential, 18-inch wheels, 12-speaker premium Pioneer DVD multi-changer, touch-screen satellite navigation, refrigerated cool box, moonroof, rain-sensing intermittent wipers, auto on/off headlamps, jet headlamp washers, privacy glass, front parking sensors, front-seat heaters, illuminated entry, electro-chromatic interior mirror, power adjustment steering column, sun visor extensions, high-gloss and metal-look instrument panel and time-delay lights.

The ZR had the same advanced safety option as the five-door Kakadu: Pre-Crash Safety (PCS) and radar cruise control, with steering wheel-mounted controls, but then sacrificed CRAWL control, electronic locking rear differential, MTS and one of the MTM cameras.

The SX had a RRP of \$55,990 and the ZR, \$65,900, plus \$2500 if the advanced safety pack option was called up.

On and Off-road

When we tested the five-door diesel Prado in 2010 we felt that the aged four-cylinder turbo-diesel was 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 felt overworked and fuel consumption was a disappointing 11L/100km when running solo and around 15L/100km when towing 1500kg. However, in the lighter, 2.1-tonnes-tare three-door the three-litre four felt quite responsive and highway fuel consumption was a respectable 8.4L/100km.

Off road it climbed to 12L/100km and was the same when towing a 1500kg caravan.





The three-door didn't have the five-door's auxiliary fuel tank, but the standard capacity of 87 litres gave a reasonable touring range.

We enjoyed driving the Prado three-door more than we did the five-door, because it felt much more sporty and was much more manoeuvrable in traffic, off road and when manoeuvring the caravan.

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.



Our earlier testing of the five-door Kakadu (similar spec levels to the ZR) against the GX (similar to the SX) indicated that the additional gear on the more expensive version wasn't worth it for most buyers. Certainly, the 17-inch tyres on the SX were a preferred size to the 18s on the ZR for those who ventured off the bitumen. The ZR bristled with electronic wizardry and much of it was a copy of the system introduced by Land Rover in the Discovery 3. The control switches for the suspension and traction variations were spread around the dashboard and on the steering wheel, so familiarisation took quite some time.



On road, the variable damper settings had a noticeable effect on ride quality, but the air-suspended rear end was, sadly, no better than its Grande predecessor's. The back end bottomed out easily on sharp bumps and lacked the suppleness of the cheaper SX's coil springs.

It did, however, keep ride height constant when a modest trailer was connected, but heavy ball loads caused the air spring pressures to rise, affecting ride quality.



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

In summary, a Toyota Prado SX three-door should suit a touring couple down to the ground, with good performance and economy, good towing manners and manoeuvrability, and Toyota build quality and resale value.

Previous Models

There are no previous Prado three-doors. For previous five-door models look up Prado in the Medium Wagon segment of this guide.

Bush Modifications

The Prado is basically well specified for serious bush work, given that it comes with 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 an SX, not the VR. 'Frills' that include leather upholstery, a sunroof, Toyota's less than wonderful 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 to improve the limited front end and belly clearance.

We'd slot either a Detroit Soft Locker or an Eaton E-Locker into the back axle.

There's space for a light 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.

However, 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-kit weight by using plasma rope rather than wire cable.