

NEWS - Toyota Prado – First Drive

We grabbed a top-spec' Prado Kakadu and a popular GXL for a bush test.

The new 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 for the five-door Prado are an upgraded petrol 4.0-litre dual VVT-i V6 and a carry-over 3.0-litre turbocharged common-rail direct-injection diesel. The diesel engine's intercooler has been moved from above the engine to behind the grille.

The three-door Prado has the turbo-diesel engine and automatic transmission, five seats and comes in SX and ZR equipment levels.



There are four equipment grades for the five-door Prado: GX, GXL, VX and Kakadu. GX is a turbo-diesel, five-seat model, with the choice of manual or automatic transmission. It has the option of a third-row seat.

GXL, VX and Kakadu equipment grades have seven seats.

GXL has a petrol or turbo-diesel engine and manual or automatic transmission.

VX and Kakadu have petrol or diesel engines; both with automatic transmission.

Standard equipment on all Prados is: 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™ mobile telephone capability, USB auxiliary input and iPod® control, side-mirror-mounted indicators, aluminium wheels, conversation mirror, UV-cut glass, ventilated cool box in the centre console and a minimum 2500kg towing capacity (three doors are rated for 3000kg).

The automatic GX has Hill-Start Assist Control (HAC) and Downhill Assist Control (DAC) and an option pack adds third-row seats and side-curtain SRS airbags.

GXL grade adds third-row seats and curtain-shield airbags, climate-control, three-zone air conditioning, rear-view camera, rear parking sensors, multi-information display, wider 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 load cover and sun visor extensions,

VX grade has electronically modulated KDSS suspension, 18-inch wheels, automatic on/off HID projector headlamps with steering-linked Adaptive Front-light System (AFS) and headlamp jet washers, rain-sensing wipers, heated front seats, power adjustment steering column, power-folding third-row seat, front parking sensors, nine-speaker audio with CD multi-changer, privacy glass, time-delay auto-cut headlights, electrochromatic interior mirror, illuminated entry, luggage rails, and multi-information display with steering wheel switch.



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, moon roof, touch-screen satellite navigation, 14-speaker premium Pioneer audio system with DVD multi-changer, rear-seat entertainment with three wireless headphones, two headphone jacks and AV input, refrigerated cool box, key-linked driver's seat and steering column memory pack.

The Kakadu has an option of Pre-Crash safety System (PCS) and radar cruise control, with steering wheel-mounted controls, but then sacrifices CRAWL control, electronic locking rear differential, MTS and one of the MTM cameras.

The SX Prado three-door has almost identical equipment levels to five-door GX, with an additional 500kg towing capacity, for a total towing capacity of 3000kg.

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

The ZR has the same advanced safety option as the five-door Kakadu.

Pricing is typically Toyota-high, but resales are very good.

5-door wagon

GX turbo-diesel manual \$55,990

(Seven-seat option \$2500)

GXL petrol manual \$60,990

GXL turbo-diesel manual \$61,990

(Add \$2500 to the above three for auto transmission)

VX petrol auto \$74,490

VX turbo-diesel auto \$75,490

Kakadu petrol auto \$87,990

Kakadu turbo-diesel auto \$88,990

3-door

SX turbo-diesel auto \$55,990

ZR turbo-diesel auto \$65,990

Advanced safety pack (Kakadu and ZR) \$2500

On and Off Road

Our test vehicles were a standard GXL diesel manual and a diesel Kakadu. Both vehicles were loaded with typical camping gear and two people. The drive involved freeways, secondary bitumen, gravel, off road trails and beach sand.

The new Prado seven-seat models have third-row seats that fold into the cargo floor, which has been raised slightly to accommodate them. The chassis have been strengthened in critical areas, but the downside is that tare weight has gone up. A consequence of that is auxiliary tank capacity has shrunk from 90 litres to 63 so that the GVM isn't exceeded with a full passenger and fuel load. Total tankage is now 150 litres, instead of the former 180 litres.

The Toyota four-cylinder diesel is showing its age and needs to be replaced by a modern V6 diesel. Performance is modest and fuel consumption on test worked out around 12L/100km.

The Kakadu bristles with electronic wizardry, but much of it is a copy of the system introduced by Land Rover in the Discovery 3. 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 GXL's coil springs.

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.

The GXL is a cool 25 grand cheaper than the Kakadu and is a much better starting point for a bush touring vehicle. It rides and handles well and its full-time 4x4, traction control and stability control give it great on and off road capability. The standard wheel and tyre sizes are fine, but we'd opt for an after-market suspension lift of 50mm to improve belly clearance and load tolerance.