



Toyota's latest Corolla Verso, replacing the last model after just two and a half years, gives the company its third MPV with seven seats. Has the compact Corolla gone a row too far?

We shouldn't be surprised that the latest Corolla Verso has sprouted an extra couple of seats. Toyota was one of the first into the compact MPV sector after Renault stole the show with its first generation Scenic in 1997. The curiously named Picnic was a three-row, six-seater from the outset and a far better car than its slow sales suggested. The Corolla Verso goes one better, equalling the tally in the Picnic's successor, the Avensis Verso.

Toyota has achieved this with a new platform - both wider and taller than its predecessor. Key to the seven-seat layout is Toyota's Easy Flat-7 boot seats. Taking their cue from the Vauxhall Zafira, they are fixed and fold away easily into the floor. One flick of the seat-back catch slides the seat cushions under the floor and releases the seat-back to latch into place, flat against the floor.

Speed is limited only by how fast you can fold the backrest down. With the back seats decked in similar fashion, the five seatbacks present a continuous flat floor, extended to the tailgate by an under-floor compartment housing the roller luggage cover behind the boot seats. Like the Zafira, all five rear seats can stay in place, giving it the seat handling advantage over the Peugeot 307 SW and VW Touran.

But space in those boot seats is cramped. See it as a car with the flexibility of an estate and an extra pair of seats suitable for young children over short distances and the Corolla Verso starts to make sense.

Estate cars have traditionally had a strong following among business users and Corolla Verso offers similar flexibility with an added dimension. Since Toyota is forecasting sales of 10,000 in 2006 - it's not surprising that it hasn't predicted Corolla Verso fleet sales. All the company would say is that it saw user-choosers as the biggest potential customers, particularly those looking at personal leasing schemes.

Toyota offers three engines in the Corolla Verso, which went on sale on 1 May - a slimmed-down version of the current car's engine choices. Entry-level models will get the 109bhp 1.6-litre petrol with variable valve timing and one **114bhp 2.0-litre D4-D** common rail diesel.

Standard equipment includes ABS and electronic brake force distribution, no less than nine airbags, including front side, curtain and a driver's knee airbag, to protect the driver's lower body in an impact. The knee airbag is a first for the compact MPV sector. Other standard equipment includes air conditioning, reach and rake adjustable steering wheel and steering wheel remote controls for the audio system.

Alloy wheels, electric door mirrors, rear electric windows, cruise control, an electrochromic rear view mirror and rain sensing wipers, roof rails and DVD navigation, including Toyota's park assist system with two front mounted and one rear mounted video camera to help with parking.

From the front, the Corolla Verso has a touch of the Citroen C-Airdream concept car about it, as the radiator grille bars curve around the Toyota badge. Apart from the small rear quarter windows, which echo the Avensis Verso, there's no hint that it's possible to fit seven inside. As we've already said, the car is best seen as a five-seater with the boot seats as occasional extras for children over short distances. In that sense it's no different to the Peugeot 307 SW or VW Touran.

Slide the electronic key into its slot, press the clutch and the small LED lamp on the large start button turns from orange to green. Prod the button briefly and the system will decide how long the starter needs to churn and then you're off. The first thing to note is that the second-generation diesel is a great deal quieter than that in its predecessor. The engine would rattle and clatter in the Avensis Verso too, so buyers of that car will be relieved to know that it too will get the revised diesel. It transforms the car from one with irritating engine noise to a diesel that can easily match its better rivals on refinement.

The Verso handles tidily too, happy to be hustled enthusiastically along the undulating roads around Seville where Toyota launched the car.

### **Verdict**

**In grafting on two extra seats, the Corolla Verso has lost some of its storage space. The drawers under the front seats and the under floor compartments in the back have gone. But overall it is rewarding to drive, offers versatile seating and offers the usual Toyota prospect of low ownership costs. The standard safety kit and estate-like flexibility should appeal to business users.**

### **Toyota Corolla Verso 2.0 D4-D T Spirit**

OTR price: £19,795

Engine: 4cy/1,995cc diesel

Max power: 114bhp at 3,600rpm

Max torque: 207lbft at 2,000 - 2,200rpm

0-62mph: 12.6sec

Max speed: 112mph

Combined mpg: 45.6mpg

CO2 emissions: 165g/km