

THE 2016 4-RUNNER TRD PRO

Is it the modern-day FJ40?

In 1976 when TLCA was founded, you could plunk down your money and drive a brand new FJ40 off the lot. You didn't get a ton of fancy options, but it was new, strong, and affordable. If you didn't have the cash, it wasn't hard to find a used 40. The FJ40 wasn't a collectible car or a luxury vehicle — it was simply the stronger, more reliable alternative to the other 4x4 vehicles available from other automakers.

I've always said that if Toyota still sold the FJ40, I'd sell a kidney and drive off the lot with one. Just imagine; no rust, no frozen bolts, no weird previous owner wiring, no holes hacked in the doors for Kraco speakers, no missing emission parts that must be found in order to obtain a license plate. Getting everything factory new and just being able to drive it, worry-free, would be a joy.

As you might surmise from these musings, I've recently been considering new Toyota 4WD vehicles. Buying an FJ40 that's not a "project" will cost you \$20k, and my beloved 80 series is showing its age. So what's the modern-day equivalent of an FJ40 that a regular guy with a regular-guy bank account might be able to afford?

The last time I seriously looked at a new Toyota (other than a mini-van) was in 2006 when the FJ Cruiser launched. While I really liked the power and style of the FJC, the lack of back seat visibility was a deal killer for our family. Our kids would be sitting in a dark cave on road trips. So we passed, thinking that we'd maybe buy the soft top model if and when it arrived.

Some other models have caught my attention, especially when they show up at Cruise Moab and perform well. The Lexus GX series is interesting, and you can find a gently used one for less than \$20k. The 200 series Land Cruiser is the king of the hill in terms of luxury and amenities, but even a used one is spendy and somewhat hard to find. Many used car websites don't even have any listings for a 200 Series.

But those are used vehicles. What about brand new? The sweet spot may be the new 4Runner, which can be driven off the lot for \$40k or less, depending which model you choose. Plus, it looks good — I love the boxy styling of the current 5th generation version of the 4Runner.



Words and Photos by Matt Farr





TRD 17-in. black alloy wheels with Nitto all-terrain tires



Packed full of camping gear, the 4Runner holds a lot of gear.

Enter the 2016 Toyota 4Runner TRD Pro Edition.

I managed to get my hands on one for a week. Within hours, I had it loaded up with Boy Scouts and camping gear and hit the road. Here are my thoughts.

First off: Wow! Toyota has kept the essence of what makes me love Toyota 4x4 vehicles. The center dash has giant knurled knobs to control all the essentials like A/C, stereo, and off-road mode features. The touch-screen is surrounded by large buttons for the most important functions rather than having all the controls on-screen. Even the key is no-nonsense simplicity; it's an old-school key with two buttons for lock and unlock.

How much does it hold?

I loaded the back of the 4Runner up with camping gear for two Boy Scouts and two adults and could still see out the back window. In addition, the center

console and door pockets are big and useful. We had the slide-out tailgate tray, which might be useful for those who like to cook meals out of the back of their vehicle. However, it consumed several inches of valuable vertical space. It holds a lot.

How does it drive on the road?

A buddy of mine has the 2016 Trail Edition 4Runner and he mentioned that his comes with KDSS (Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System), which isn't available on the TRD Pro. I thought the TRD Pro was very enjoyable to drive on the highway, around town, and on the trail. If the other versions are even better, then you win no matter which version you choose.

How does it wheel?

I took the 4Runner up to Slaughterhouse Gulch near Bailey, Colorado. I have run this trail many times in both my 80 and

my old 40. Knowing the trail so well so well made it easy to evaluate the performance of the TRD Pro since I know how to approach and drive every obstacle.

So how did it do? Awesome.

The off-the-lot TRD Pro 4Runner is an excellent wheelin' machine. Honestly, you could buy it, install sliders for essential protection, and spank any moderate trail. With A-Trac and a rear locker, the 4Runner is seriously capable right out of the box.

Another thing I really liked was its size. It's narrower and shorter than my 80. It's easier to avoid paint-scraping branches on tight trails and it feels lighter and more nimble on obstacles. Compared to the current 200 series Land Cruiser, the 4Runner feels like an energetic teenage athlete ready to take on the world. No disrespect meant to 200 owners, but it's an entirely different experience.

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The A-Trac, rear locker, multi-terrain select and crawl control are all available via traditional switches and knobs for easy, intuitive use.

How are the interior ergonomics?

Toyota has done a great job with maintaining a set of controls that traditionalists will love. The TRD Pro and Trail editions have a real transfer case lever to shift into 4lo. The stereo has great big knobs to tune in your favorite radio station or flip through songs on your phone. And the touchscreen has the most important functions controlled by real, well-labeled buttons right next to the screen for quick, easy operation. The whole thing worked great. I quickly and easily connected the Bluetooth to my phone for excellent hands-free phone calls and streaming music. I also connected my old school 160 GB iPod to the USB port and was able to control everything through the touchscreen better than any secondary interface I've ever used. You'll think this is weird, but that alone was enough to make me a serious fan of the 4Runner.

I will say that I missed the push button start that comes standard on most premium Toyota vehicles these days. The Limited Edition 4Runner has the push button start (as does the Land Cruiser and even the Toyota Sienna minivan) but the TRD Pro edition has a simple key. On the other hand, it's one less system to malfunction.

Can I sleep in it?

One of my favorite things about my 80 is that I can sleep in the back by flipping down the 2nd row seats. It's long enough that I can stretch out and get a good night's sleep. There's more room in a tent, but when you get off the trail at 10 p.m. and all you want to do is eat something, drink a beer, and hit the sack, being able to sleep in your truck is a big advantage.



You get a lot of room in the back with the seats flipped down.

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4x4 Overland

So, what about the 4Runner? Can a person of average height sleep in it? Well, you could, if you're willing to fold down both sides of the 2nd row seats and sleep diagonally. That's not a great solution for me, since my truck is usually full of tools, gear, food and an ARB fridge. I don't think it's a deal killer, but it's the only feature I really wanted that the 4Runner didn't provide.

Today's 4Runner: The heir to the FJ40?

From an outsider's view, it seems like Toyota has made some recent smart decisions to differentiate their 4WD vehicles. In 2006, you could have purchased a brand new FJ Cruiser, a big fourth gen 4Runner, or an even bigger 100 series Land Cruiser. A decade later, the FJC has been retired, the 4Runner has retained its lean size, and the Land Cruiser has bulked up in every dimension. A new 4Runner is vastly different than a new Land Cruiser today. They've really gone in different directions and you can guess which one is closer to our old workhorse; the FJ40.

As offroad enthusiasts, something else to consider is that in 2015, Toyota sold 97,034 4Runners in the U.S. alone. Compare that to the 2,687 Land Cruisers that were sold. You can quickly see which one will have more aftermarket support and less expensive costs. If you don't want to buy a new 4Runner, there are plenty of lightly-used, highly-capable 4Runners available that have never left the pavement. To a lesser degree, that's the kind of availability that the FJ40 had back in the 1970s.



Crawls like a champ, even with the stock tires.

It's only a matter of time before the 4Runner becomes the dominant Toyota 4x4 in the United States. Maybe it already has. It's a great vehicle and the TRD Pro Edition is even sweeter. Go drive one and see for yourself.



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