

## Shifting Gears

### Toyota's Surprise Coupe: The Scion tC

Posted: 30 Apr 2011 11:14 PM PDT



**By Roger Witherspoon**

It was not a night for driving.

The rain fell in a continuous, sheet at a rate of more than an inch an hour, turning visibility into a macabre version of peek-a-boo where you were allowed just a glimpse of roadway with each swipe of the windshield wiper blades. The small portion of the parkway visible in the headlights was black with a moving sheen of about an inch of water from the swollen, muddy, polluted Saw Mill River that usually meanders slowly from suburban Westchester County down past the elephants in the Bronx Zoo in New York City.

The traction control in the Toyota Scion tC was working overtime trying to keep the Sport Coupe's 18-inch alloy wheels rolling in a semblance of a straight line. Suddenly, there was a dip in the road and the sloping, aggressive face of the Scion turned submarine and hit what seemed like a wall of water, which splashed up and over the compact sports car. The water in that stretch of roadway turned out to be

about a foot deep – six inches higher than the Scion's clearance.

But there was no point in stopping. The rain was falling harder, the river was rising and, about a hundred yards ahead, the receding tail lights of another car were visible. There was no way to tell if the other vehicle was a tall SUV or another small car whose door jams were under water – but it did show the way to go.

We slowed down and plowed through the rising, fast moving water. The double sunroof, which illuminated the front and rear seats during the day and made the small car seem roomier than it really was, now was lit by intermittent bursts of lightning which provided fleeting glimpses of how much water there was.

The Scion, like the high end Toyotas and Lexus models, is tightly sealed to keep out wind noise, something that is appreciated when cruising along and listening to the mellow sounds of jazz musician Keiko Matsui. But on this occasion the seals were appreciated for keeping the water out as the car parted the waters and slid along the parkway until, finally, we reached higher ground and saw the police coming to close off the roadway.



Rain or shine, the Scion has a lot going for it. It is a stylish little coupe whose sloping teardrop shape stands out among the extremely boxy, ungainly machines that have characterized the Scion fleet presented at the New York International Auto Show in the Jacob Javits Center. The show opens today and runs through May 1. And the Scion tC needs to be very distinctive: at \$21,400 it is competing with the VW Jetta, the sporty Honda CR-Z, the Nissan Cube and the technologically exceptional Ford Fiesta, which costs \$3,000 less.

Under the Scion's sloping hood is a 2.5-liter in-line, four cylinder, aluminum alloy engine cranking out 180 horsepower—10 more than the Jetta and 60 more than the Fiesta. That provides a lot of juice in a light car like this. Scion is a front wheel drive car, and comes with either a six speed manual transmission or, for \$1,000 more, a six speed automatic transmission with an electronic manual mode. With either

engine, the EPA estimates the Scion tC gets 23 miles per gallon of regular gas in city driving, and 31 MPG on the highway – not counting the parking lots that pass for highways in cities like Atlanta and New York.



The Scion's designers gave some thought to the interior, making sure that a low end price did not mean cheap. To begin with, there is that double sunroof, and the one over the front seats is power adjustable. The console and its dash-mounted controls are easy to find in the dark without a lot of fumbling.

The test car had a small, four-inch color information screen which was touch activated. Scion also offers a navigation system for an additional \$1,000 and, with that, comes a clear, color backup camera. There are gauges for outside temperature, average MPG, and an "ECO-drive" monitor showing the present rate of fuel usage, which is useful in helping one drive in the most fuel efficient manner.



The entertainment options were ample. The car had AM/FM and XM satellite radio, as well as HD radio and a single disc CD player, as well as a USB and iPod ports. The adjustable sound is provided by a 300-watt Pioneer unit with eight speakers and a subwoofer. It automatically adjusts according to the car's speed, though that really isn't necessary: a car built tightly enough to swim and keep your feet dry also lets you hear every distinct, soft note in Keiko Matsui's *Whisper from the Mirror* without unwanted interference from the passing wind. The tC also sports one of the easiest, most efficient Bluetooth systems on the road. Both the entertainment and cell phone systems can be operated from the dash or via fingertip controls on the leather steering wheel.

As one might expect, the seats were manually operated and covered in cloth instead of leather – score one for Jetta. But the front seats are wide, thick, and comfortable. The rear seats recline have enough leg room for the average six-footer to nap contentedly. And in the absence of passengers or kids, the rear seats can fold flat in a 60/40 split to enhance an already ample trunk.

The Scion is in a tough market. It is facing stiffer competition from the Germans and a resurgent Detroit. And Toyota's production line has been slowed because of the tragic confluence of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disasters back in Japan.

Still, people walking past the hulking, square Scion SUV do an involuntary double take at the sight of the sleek Scion tC. They may find a longer look worthwhile.



**2011 Toyota Scion tC Coupe**

**MSRP:** **\$21,417**

**EPA Mileage:** **23 MPG City** **31 MPG Highway**

**Performance / Safety:**

2.5-Liter, 4-cylinder, aluminum alloy engine producing 180 horsepower and 173 pound/feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual shift; front wheel drive; MacPherson strut front suspension; double wishbone rear suspension; anti-lock brake system; 18-inch alloy wheels; stability and traction control; driver and front passenger seat-mounted side, knee and front airbags; front and rear side curtain airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/XM satellite and HD radio; Pioneer 300-watt sound system with 8 speakers and subwoofer; USB and iPod connections; CD player; Bluetooth; front powered, and rear sunroof; tilt & telescoping, leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip audio, cruise and Bluetooth controls; 60/40 folding rear seats.