

# 2006 Toyota Matrix: Value Meets Fun

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During the early part of this decade Toyota was examining its vehicle line up and the decision was made to build a car to entice young people who were looking for something that was small, fun to drive, and affordable. While the Corolla served faithfully in this capacity, Toyota needed something that spoke excitement. The Corolla just wasn't that kind of a car and something radically different was needed. Enter the Matrix. Based on the Corolla platform, the Matrix does what no Corolla can do: turn heads. Let's take a look at this sporty compact and see how the 2006 model stacks up.

In 2003, the Matrix was introduced to the North American market. Built in California as a joint venture with General Motors – the Pontiac Vibe is its twin – the Matrix is aimed toward budget conscious young people who want a car that makes a statement. To save money, the Corolla frame was used, but the Matrix stands some 3 inches taller and is 8 inches shorter than its Toyota sibling. The roof line on the Matrix is completely different too as it slopes from front to back and ends in a wedge, giving the car somewhat of a wagon look to it. This rakish appearance is what gives the Matrix its unique look as well as an extra bit of room for people and their stuff. Indeed, both driver and front passenger sit higher up, much like in a small SUV or as in a car like Chrysler's PT Cruiser. With four doors and a rear lift gate, the Matrix acts more like a wagon, but its sleek exterior easily refutes that fact.

Motorists have a choice between front wheel drive and a four wheel drive versions of the car, something not offered on the Corolla. The standard motor for the Matrix is a 1.8-liter DOHC 16-valve VVT-I 4-cylinder engine. Mated to a five speed manual transmission, the engine turns out a respectable 126hp. For more power, there is also a higher tuned version of the same engine delivering 164hp. It gets paired with a six speed manual transmission. Four wheel drive versions of the Matrix come equipped with a 4-wheel anti-lock brake system [ABS] which is optional on 2WD models.

Gas mileage for the Matrix makes the car a motorist's dream. At 30 mpg city and 36 mpg highway, the front wheel drive version of the car produces some of the best results of any non-hybrid car sold in North America. A 13 gallon fuel tank makes 400 mile trips a possibility on just one tank of gas; this is particularly good for the student who has to drive back and forth between college campus and home.

Unlike many cars of its size, the aftermarket crowd has produced a wide variety of products to help Matrix owners customize their vehicles. Hood protectors, tail light covers, polymer air dams, fog lights, hood scoops and vents, mud flaps, and paintable window covers are some of the Toyota parts and accessories pitched to youth, who are the primary owners of the Matrix.

MSRP starts at US\$15,110 [CDN\$17,200] with a top of the line Matrix topping out at just under US\$20K to about CDN\$25K.

For the entire North American market, Toyota sells nearly 100,000 Matrix' per year. Not bad for a car whose origins are fairly simple but whose heart is truly sporty and youth minded. Copyright 2005 -- **Matt Keegan** is a contributing writer for **Auto Parts Canada**, a wholesaler of fine **Toyota parts and Toyota accessories** for your Toyota truck, van, SUV, or passenger car.