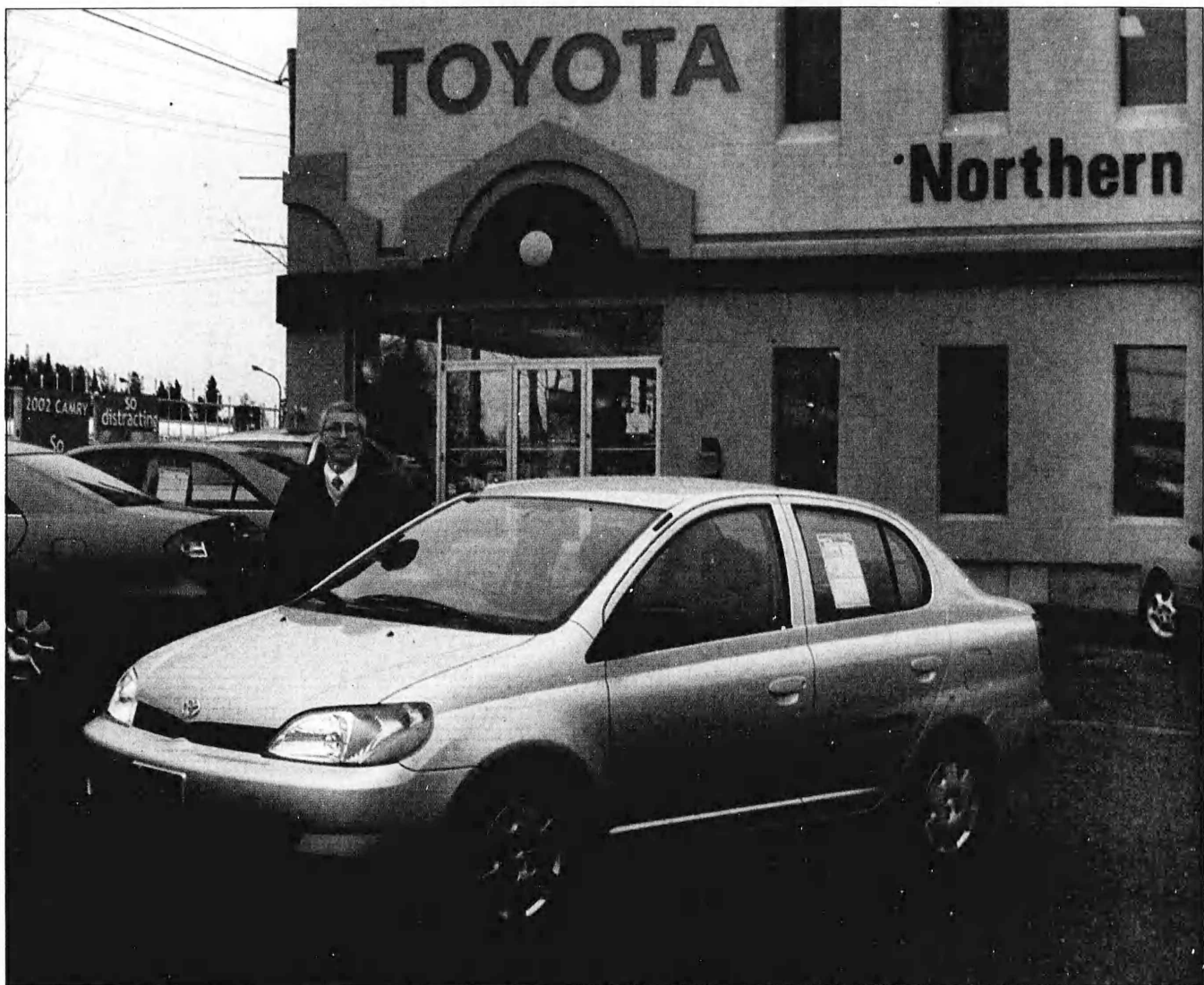


Motoring Trends

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Take a run down to Northern Toyota and let Lorne Johnson show you around the 2002 Toyota Echo.

There is so much room in this vehicle you can hear an Echo

by MICK HARPER

Echo is the latest addition to Toyota's economy sedan segment. It is a descendant of the Corolla which was originally introduced in 1968 and became hugely popular during the 1970's. Tercel was introduced in 1980 and it soon replaced Corolla with a roomier and more powerful compact sedan. During the '90's, Tercel became known as a best buy and for class leading quality.

Launched for the 2000 model year, Echo offers more room, performance, and value than even the benchmark Tercel. That is filling some big shoes! Echo is designed to please with extremely good fuel economy and an entry level price of just over \$15,000.

Echo comes in two-door or four-door models, and I tested the latter from Northern Toyota. Inside, Echo lacks many of the bells and whistles of higher priced vehicles, but perhaps the best attribute of this car is its functionality. A four-speaker AM/FM cassette is standard, but my tester had the optional CD Player. Whereas side mirrors and seats can be adjusted manually, other extras included power door locks, air conditioning, colour-keyed bumpers and door handles, and block heater.

For all its practical characteristics,

SPEC SHEET

2002 Toyota Echo
Vehicle type: front engine, 4-door, 5-passenger compact sedan
Price as tested: \$18,520 plus applicable taxes
Engine: 1.5L 4-cylinder DOHC 16-valve with VVT-i
Horsepower: 108 bhp @ 6,000 rpm
Torque: 105 lb. ft. @ 4,200 rpm
Transmission: 4-speed automatic with overdrive

Echo has some revolutionary design elements. It has a cab forward design and the interior space of a larger car and is easier to get in and out of, thanks to a higher seat hip position and wide opening doors. A higher seat position and greater headroom also means better visibility.

A funky dash begins with centre mounted speedometer, which requires less eye movement and therefore less distraction from the road. Gauges are grouped together to make them simple and easy to read.

Storage space abounds inside Echo's roomy interior. Hidden under the front passenger seat is a storage tray to keep

valuables out of sight, while concealed in the dash are a few pockets and a two-stage glove box. Pockets for maps and magazines can be found in the doors and on the backs of the front bucket seats. Cupholders are located in the front and the rear as well. Folding the 60/40 split rear bench seat forward exposes a large trunk for storage of much larger items. The trunk lid also has an internal release.

Echo's entry level price doesn't mean Toyota scrimped on safety. In fact, it does just the opposite. Echo combines an impact-absorbing body with a high-integrity cabin that has outperformed safety goals. Echo has

achieved the world's highest safety rating in each vehicle class in tests that reflect actual accident situations.

Standard features on all models include dual front air bags, rear child seat tether anchors, three-point safety belts for all passengers, and driver and front passenger seatbelt pretensioners and force limiters.

The diminutive 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine squeezes out excellent fuel economy, rated at 7.4L/100 km (38 mpg) city; 5.6L/100 km (50 mpg). Variable Valve Timing (VVT-i) increases fuel economy, performance, and reduces emissions, and Echo's uses of it is a first for this class of vehicle. This feature enables Echo to meet Canadian Low Emissions Vehicle (LEV) standards.

The Echo I tested was equipped with the optional four-speed automatic gearbox with uphill shift logic. This feature senses road grade and engine load to control shifting, by keeping the transmission in a lower gear while ascending a hill. It minimizes gear hunting and aids in fuel economy.

Picking up where Corolla and Tercel left off, Toyota Echo is designed for those who want the economy, practicality, and affordability in a compact car. Echo does all that and more, raising the standard for the compact car class.

Mazda ready to make some noise

by TED LATURNUS
For Southam Newspapers

CALGARY - According to Mark Fields, president of Mazda, his company is returning to its "roots."

Mazda has bounced back, increasing its market share to four per cent in Canada, thanks to a strong lineup of models that include the MPV minivan, Tribute sport ute and new Protege 5 hatchback.

At this year's Tokyo show, it unveiled a fresh crop of interesting and innovative vehicles, including an all-new, rotary-powered RX-8, set for release in the spring of 2003.

For the first time in the history of this model, the RX-8 will have four doors, very similar in design to the current breed of extended cab pickup trucks... no exterior door handles, in other words, and only deployed after the front doors are opened. The new RX-8 is to be powered by a rotary engine code-named Renesis. As well as being smaller

than previous rotaries, it will develop about 250 horsepower. The new RX-8 will also feature a front mid-ship engine layout, and will have a 50/50 weight distribution. Mazda says the rotary sports sedan is "at the final stage of development for mass production."

But that ain't all.

Front and centre at the Tokyo show was an all-new 626 four-door midsize sedan. Actually, Mazda prefers to call it the Mazda 6 now and it's known as the Atenza in Japan. Whatever, it's a beautiful automobile, with what Mazda describes as "bold and predatory" styling. The new Mazda 6 will be offered in North America as a four-door sedan at first, but a station wagon version is on the drawing boards, as well as a four-door hatchback with a trick folding rear seat modelled after a wind-up Japanese doll called a "karakauri." All models will have interior styling cues borrowed from the Miata and last-generation RX-7. The Mazda 6 is arguably

the most European-flavoured sedan the company has ever produced, and has a unique double wishbone/MacPherson strut front suspension and a multi-link rear set-up.

Power for the Mazda 6 will be provided by a brand-new, 2.3-litre four-cylinder engine with four valves per cylinder and a variable valve timing system Mazda calls SVT, or Sequential Valve Timing, as well as an optional 3.0-L V-6. Output for the four-banger will be in the 180-h.p. neighbourhood.

The new Mazda 6 will have a five-speed manual and four-speed automatic transmission, and four-wheel disc brakes with ABS will be standard issue. A traction control system and up to six airbags will be part of the package, as well as an all-new crash protection system. The Mazda 6 is part of the company's global strategy and we can expect to see it in Canada in about a year.

And just to show that it's definitely alive and kicking, Mazda had its newest

concept car on display. Known as the Secret Hideout, it looks like a cross between an Austin Mini and a fridge.

The idea, according to Mazda designers, is a softly styled vehicle with a "simple heart-warming exterior" and a "relaxing living-room like interior." Featuring limousine-style suicide doors, flared wheel arches and an art deco pastel paint job, the Secret Hideout has seats that fold out into a Pullman-type bed, an articulating rear tailgate, "man-machine" interface technology... voice-activated controls and a thrifty 1.3-L four cylinder engine with sequential valve timing.

The Secret Hideout is very similar in concept to the Nissan Pao, which was built about 10 years ago; at first glance, it could pass as a 1950s-era Renault or Citroen wagon.

For a variety of reasons, the Secret Hideout will never make it over to North America, and may or may not go into production for the Japanese market.

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