

2008

# SCION xB and xD

Keeping it boxy and sweet

BY CALVIN KIM » PHOTOS BY BRIAN BLADES

SCION'S xB, THE perennial winner of our annual "Most Square Car" award, returns for 2008 with a complete makeover. While some bemoan the loss of the hard-edged styling, there's no denying that this all-new, softer-edged xB is a better car.

Scion has increased its size, horsepower and usability. Interior volume—already a strong point—is up 11.2 cu. ft. from an increase in every dimension. The car is a foot longer and nearly 3 in. wider than before, with a wheelbase that has grown 4 in. All this size comes at a price: over 620 pounds, and we don't mean pounds sterling.

Thankfully, the 2AZ-FE engine comes to the rescue. Displacing 2.4 liters, this inline-4 incorporates balance shafts for smooth operation and VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing with intelligence) for improved performance. Scion claims 158 bhp at 6000 rpm and 162 lb.-ft. of torque at 4000 rpm, on 87-octane gasoline. EPA figures, measured via the tougher new standards, are 22 mpg city, 28 mpg highway. The engine can be mated to either a 4-speed automatic with sequential-shift (a Toyota/Scion first), or a 5-speed manual transmission.

With the increase in room and power, the xB is more usable, helped further by improved cargo management and a revised dash layout. The rear seats fold completely flat and there's even space underneath them to store small items. The floor of the

rear cargo area opens to reveal even more storage and, like the previous iteration, the front seats can recline all the way back. The dash layout is all-new, with a driver-centric center layout.

Based on the Toyota Yaris, the new dramatically styled Scion xD seems much bigger than it really is. Nevertheless, it's a nimble car with a strong emphasis on daily usability. The interior features a reclining rear seat that can slide forward 6 in. Like the xB, there's a 60/40 folding seatback that can be folded flat to hold extra cargo.

Particular emphasis was placed on reducing noise and increasing durability. Strategically placed foam and felt are employed throughout the cabin to absorb noise, vibration and harshness. Special attention was paid to the underbody, wipers and roofline to reduce wind noise and drag. Galvanized steel and an acrylic-based underbody coating prevent corrosion and chipping.

Underhood, Toyota's 2ZR-FE 1.8-liter inline-4 is on duty, returning excellent EPA fuel economy of 28 mpg city, 30 mpg highway. Its 128 bhp at 6000 rpm and 125 lb.-ft. of torque at 4400 rpm won't win any power wars,

but this is the first small engine in the Scion lineup to feature VVT-i on both intake and exhaust cams. A 4-speed automatic or 5-speed manual is available.

Although Scion calls its cars mono-spec, you can get them in a few combinations. Aside from transmission choices, there are three stereo options. All feature iPod hookup and an aux-in jack. The middle-level radio adds satellite reception, a line-out jack for amp hookup and an active display with user-uploadable videos and images. The premium package adds GPS navigation and DVD movie playback functionality. Both cars get standard cruise control, power windows, locks and mirrors, and steering-wheel-mounted audio controls.

Driving dynamics are generally underwhelming in the econo-class segment, but these two Scions are exceptions. The xB's new engine, while raspy, is peppy and fun to rev. The automatic shifts firmly in sequential mode, and the cable-actuated manual feels like it belongs in a much more

expensive car. The cavernous interior is functional while having some newfound form.

The xD's small size and short overhangs make parallel parking a breeze. The 2ZR engine is smooth and has very linear power delivery. Like the xB, the 5-speed is crisp. An alphabet soup of computer stability and braking functions help keep both cars on the road, but stability and traction control can be disabled with the push of a button. Burn-out drivers, rejoice!

Granted, neither of these new Scion hatchbacks will win any sports car wars, but with available accessories from TRD, you can turn either one into a very hot little 5-door. The xB went on sale in May with a base price of \$15,650, and although no official pricing has been set, the xD will be available in August for a similar price.



» Dual VVT-i is a Scion first. The xD interior comes in dark charcoal; sporty shift knob is optional.

» Looks can be deceiving. The xB (left) is much larger than the xD (right).

