

Toyopet

Going on sale in July of 1958, the Toyopet was the first Toyota vehicle sold in America. Chrome-laden with a distinct American look, the modified 1959 Toyopet was praised for its ruggedness, durability, and small size. However, it was overpriced, underpowered, for the U.S. market, and lacked the “creature comforts” of other vehicles. After stumbling in sales the first two years Toyota halted passenger car exports to the US altogether in December 1960, until a new car, better suited to America, could be designed. In 1965 Toyota introduced the completely redesigned Toyopet Crown, renamed the Corona.

- **In September 1957 the first two Toyota Toyopets were unloaded at the port of Los Angeles, representing some of the first Japanese passenger cars ever to be exported to America.**
- **Confident in their product, Toyota extended the warranties against defective parts and workmanship for 1959 Toyopets to six months or 6000 miles compared to customary automotive warranties at the time of 4000 miles or four months.**
- **When road testing the Toyopet engineers discovered that it did not have enough horsepower to pull the vehicle over the hills near Los Angeles. Under these mountainous conditions, the engine overheated, power plummeted and loud, threatening noises radiated from under the hood.**

Testing Phase

It was quickly realized that the Toyopet was not engineered for American roads or American drivers. Used as taxis in Tokyo, the Toyopet was ideal for duty on the rough and bumpy roads of post World War II Japan, but unsuited for high speeds and easy steering, weighing over 3,000 lbs and powered by a mere 58 horsepower engine.

As one American executive later observed, the Toyopet was "underpowered, overpriced (\$700 more than the number one import Volkswagen) and built like a tank." Additionally, it was plain, uncomfortable and had serious mechanical shortcomings.

American Sales Administrator James F. McGraw, hired by Toyota for their US division, had issues with the name “Toyopet.” He claimed that the name was all wrong, stating that “Toy” sounded like a toy, and toys break, and “pet” sounded like a dog. Other American executives concurred.



Redesigned

The Toyopet was offered in:



| | | | |
|-------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1959: | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Sedan | \$1,999 |
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| | | 4-Door Sedan | \$1,995 |
| | | 4-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,211 |
| | | 2-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,111 |
| 1961: | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Sedan | \$1,830 |
| | | 4-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,080 |
| 1962: | 1900 Series | 4-Door Sedan | \$1,615 |
| | | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Sedan |
| | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,080 |
| | | Toyopet Crown Tiara | 4-Door Sedan |
| 1963: | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,080 |
| | | 4-Door Custom Sedan | \$1,830 |
| 1964: | Toyopet Crown | 4-Door Custom Sedan | \$1,830 |
| | | 4-Door Custom Wagon | \$2,080 |
| | Toyopet Tiara | 4-Door Sedan | \$1,638 |

The 1960 model year Toyopet was officially renamed the Toyota Crown, but the name Toyopet was still used.

In 1965 the Toyopet Crown was completely redesigned and reintroduced, becoming Toyota's first big hit, the Toyota Corona.

WAGON

Station wagons were offered in the fall of 1959.

Features of the wagon included a double steel reinforced chassis, washable vinyl upholstery, and a unique “one handed” rear window and tailgate operation.

CROWN CUSTOM SEDAN

The Toyopet Crown Custom vehicles were offered in a 2 or 4-door edition and a 2 or 4-door station wagon.

The 4-door Toyopet Crown Custom Sedan was slated to aim for the luxury market of importers. A special feature was a door safety light mounted on the dash that would flash if any doors were ajar. It fit six people.

Other features included deep pile carpets, foam rubber seats, electric outlets for trouble lights, and a speedometer which showed green until the needle topped 50 mph, after that it glowed red. The top speed was 80 mph.

It had courtesy lights in the glove compartment, under the hood, and in the trunk. The back passenger doors were suicide doors, opening to a full 90 degrees. It boasted 117 custom features. It had white wall tires, a heater, undercoating, and gas tank locks.

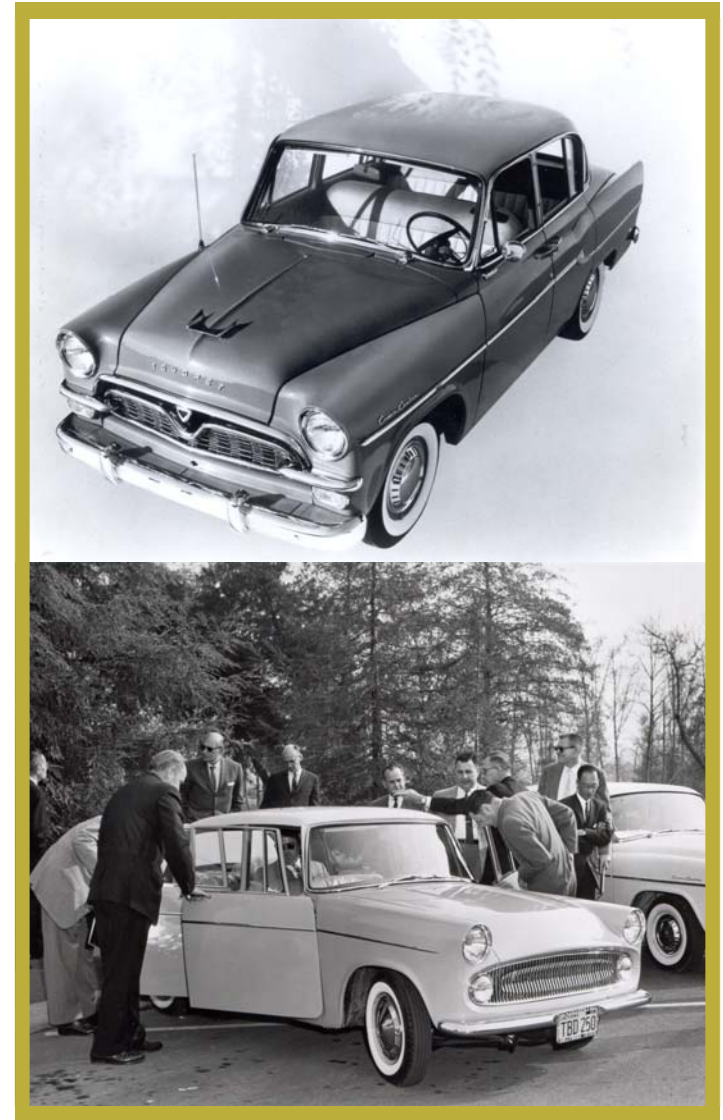
The Toyopet Crown Custom sold for between \$2,300 and \$2,900.

DEALERS

By the end of 1958, Toyota’s 45 dealers sold 287 Toyopets.

By the end of 1960, when Toyota decided to stop exporting Toyopets to the US, they had sold a total of 1,913 Toyopets.

By 1965, when the Corona was exported to the US to replace the Toyopet, sales of Toyota’s introductory passenger car reached a cumulative 2,314 vehicles.



Praise and press for Toyopet

In Chicago on Thursday, January 7th, 1960, the Toyopet was driven for 12 hours straight, sustaining an average 34.59 miles per gallon. An automotive technician and a field editor by for an automotive publication performed this experiment in downtown Chicago, ultimately covering 211 miles of city driving.

Car expert James E. Potter wrote enthusiastically about the four-door Toyopet sedan upon its arrival, “Close examination of the Toyopet, furnished to the magazine for a road test by the distributor, revealed that here is a family machine that is extremely well-built, and there is a considerable emphasis on clever and handy little details.” – November 29, 1959: Denver Post.

Pierre Hardy, of San Francisco Motors, drove the Toyopet 180 times, in reverse, around the public library to promote its display at the imported car show in Brooks Hall. That’s 15 trips per hour, six hours per day with six 10- minute coffee breaks. Friday, November 20, 1959: San Francisco Examiner.

