

Daily Herald

AUTOFOCUS

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SECTION 9

# AutoSunday

## Station wagon gets a sporty facelift with Toyota Venza

By ANN M. JOB  
For The Associated Press

The 2009 Toyota Venza is the latest attempt by automakers to disguise a station wagon as a new, modern vehicle. And you know what? The Venza succeeds nicely.

From its wide, comfortable front seats, taller-than-a-car views and well-arranged gauges and controls to its 70.1 cubic feet of cargo space and fuel-thrifty engines, the Venza is a welcome addition to the burgeoning crossover sport utility vehicle segment.

In fact, in a break with most competitors, the Venza looks less like an SUV and more like a tall, but not too bulky, car.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$26,695 for a four-cylinder 2009 Venza with front-wheel-drive and automatic transmission. Starting retail price for a 2009 Venza with all-wheel-drive is \$28,145, and a V-6-powered Venza starts at \$28,520.

### At a glance

**Price as tested:** \$32,435

**Engine:** 2.7-liter, double overhead cam four cylinder

**City/highway fuel economy:** 21/29 miles per gallon

**Top speed:** 125 mph

**Length:** 189 inches

**Wheelbase:** 109.3 inches

**Curb weight:** 3,760 pounds

**Built:** Georgetown, Ky.

Venza is a combination of the word "venture" and Monza, which denotes a sporting nature. But despite its flared wheel wells, large, standard 19-inch tires and snarly chrome-covered grille, the Venza seems more like an accommodating, no-fuss driver with a compliant ride than a sporty performer.

It's based on the Toyota's top-selling car, the front-wheel-drive Camry, though the Venza is offered in both front- and all-wheel-drive. The all-wheel-drive system and some suspension bits are borrowed from Toyota's second best-selling SUV, the Highlander.

Meantime, the Camry's 2.4-liter, four-cylinder engine is the basis for the new 2.7-liter four that's in the Venza, while the Venza's 3.5-liter V-6 is the same V-6 that's in the Camry and Highlander. In the Venza, this V-6 affords a towing capacity of 3,500 pounds — the same towing capacity as the Highlander. In other words, the 15.75-foot-long Venza isn't structurally far from two of Toyota's stalwart vehicles.

But the Venza's exterior and interior styling are new. I liked everything about the inside of the Venza. At 5 feet 4, I opened the door and settled down only about 2 inches to get onto the seat. Yet, views out were better than that in a lower-riding Camry. The Venza is 5.5 inches taller than a Camry.

The openness of the dashboard area and the attractive, optional leather trim on the test vehicle's seats helped create an upscale feel. So did the quiet interior. There was some road noise, but it wasn't overwhelming, and wind noise at highway speeds was nicely muted.

The Venza comes with some features not usually considered standard. These include dual climate control, tilt and telescoping steering wheel, carbon fiber-style interior trim, tonneau cover over the cargo, sun visors with sliding extensions, AM/FM audio system with six-disc changer and rear spoiler.

The test vehicle had the base, four-cylinder engine that's basically a bored out version of the 2.4-liter four in the Camry. This moved the front-wheel-drive auto, which weighs about 3,800 pounds, with pep in most driving situations. There was a bit of sluggishness on mountain roads, though.

All shifts were silky smooth in the Venza, which comes with only one transmission — a six-speed automatic.

The efficient, six gears help account for the Venza's fuel economy rating from the federal government of 21 miles per gallon in city driving and 29 mpg on the highway with the four cylinder and front-wheel-drive.

Toyota officials expect to sell 60,000 or so Venzas in the first full production year to empty nesters and others who are suffering from "SUV fatigue." Evidently, these buyers won't be wary of a newfangled station wagon.



ASSOCIATED PRESS/Courtesy of Toyota  
The base, four-cylinder engine in the 2009 Toyota Venza is basically a version of the 2.4-liter engine in the Camry.



# CAPRI



## This fun-loving import put Lincoln-Mercury division in the small-car limelight

By MALCOLM GUNN  
Wheelbase Communications

Back in the early 1970s, the sight of the tiny Capri surrounded by acres of opera-windowed, padded-roofed Grand Marquis Broughams and Designer Series Continentals on the Lincoln-Mercury dealer lot was a lesson in contrast, to say the least.

Yet, there it was, a 2,000-pound weakling vying for attention, just like the rest of the imports of the day.

Of course, imported automobiles had been a burr in Detroit's backside ever since the first baby boomers learned to crawl. To combat that threat, North American manufacturers devised a number of strategies that included bringing vehicles built by their European affiliates to our shores.

In Ford's case, the company introduced a succession of Ford-branded British-built small cars throughout the 1950s and '60s, including the Anglia, Consul, Zephyr and Cortina, plus the German-built Taunus.

But, it wasn't until 1970 that the company's more upscale Lincoln-Mercury division would be given its own exclusive import to sell.

That year, the Mercury Capri (the name originated from a 1950s Lincoln model) arrived from Ford's plant in Cologne, Germany. The compact two-door coupe possessed understated lines and a classy, if slightly cramped interior. In short, the Capri (it never actually wore a Mercury badge) seemed the perfect small-car fit that complemented L-M's lineup of mid- to premium-priced iron. It was also positioned a notch above Ford's Cortina, a thoroughly competent, albeit budget-priced import. In fact, both the Cortina and Capri

shared the same chassis as well as a 75-horsepower, 1.6-liter four-cylinder motor and four-speed manual gearbox.

The Capri opened to an onslaught of promotional fanfare in mid-April of 1970 and was marketed as the "The Sexy European." Although the buzzy four-banger didn't exactly speak the language of performance, the car sold reasonably well to folks willing to part with at least \$2,300 for a helping of Euro-style ride, handling and fuel economy.

In its sophomore year, an optional 100-horsepower, 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine altered the car's benign character and made sporty-minded enthusiasts sit up and take notice. An optional three-speed automatic transmission also widened the Capri's circle of admirers and delighted L-M dealers, who had the sales figures to prove it.

By year three, the littlest Mercury was on a roll and was given a further shot in the arm in the form of an available 2.6-liter V-6 that generated 107 horsepower and 130 foot-pounds of torque.

The V-6 couldn't have arrived at a better time since increasingly tighter government-mandated emissions regulations were taking a significant horsepower bite from both four-cylinders. The Capri's original 1.6 was rated down to just 64 meager ponies, while the 2.0 made an equally underwhelming 86.

As if that wasn't bad enough, new front- and side-impact-protection rules added weight to all passenger cars, including the Capri, which was forced into wearing ungainly front and rear bumpers. To offset the extra bulk, the 1974 edition offered the same 120-horse, 2.8-

### Fine Lines

1970-'77 Mercury Capri

liter V-6 upgrade that was available on the small Ford Mustang II.

Economic issues were also affecting the Capri. Double-digit inflation in North America coupled with a weakening U.S. dollar was driving up the cost of imported automobiles. As a result, the base price had breached the \$4,100 mark — nearly double the car's original sticker — by the time the all-new 1976 Capri II arrived in March of 1975. The car had grown slightly, displayed cleaner styling with larger windows and had been converted into a handy hatchback. Unfortunately, it carried about 500 pounds (minimum) of added weight, losing some of its nimbleness in the process.

To compensate, a new 88-horsepower, 2.3-liter four-cylinder became the base powerplant, while the 2.8 V-6 remained optional. Base, Ghia and Sport models could be selected, with the latter available with rally wheels and a special black or white with gold trim paint scheme and a gold cloth interior.

The Capri II lasted only two model years before Ford pulled the plug on the automobile's North American production in August of 1977. By then, Lincoln-Mercury dealers were busy selling the subcompact Bobcat, which was their version of the Ford Pinto, plus the Ford Maverick-based Comet compact. The smart looking German runabout seemed hardly missed.

The Capri remained for strictly European consumption until 1986, while the name found new life on this side of the ocean beginning in 1979 as Mercury's American-made version of the Ford Mustang.

Today, rust and neglect have reduced the original Capri's numbers to the brink. That's understandable, considering these German-made gems encouraged spirited driving and would have simply worn out, leaving only happy memories behind.

• E-mail Malcolm Gunn at [www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html](mailto:www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html).

## Maintain your auto to avoid breakdowns

Often I have clients tell me they are pretty good with having their oil changed but they feel the rest of the recommended service in the maintenance schedule is not necessary. I wonder if they feel that way when they board an airplane? Case in point happened at the shop this week.

Last month a client came in for an oil change and a brake inspection. The car had more than 100,000 miles on it and that fact caused us to question whether the timing belt had been changed. The client knew that it was the original timing belt but did not want to change it and was convinced it would go for a long time with out causing a problem. Less than a month later he limped the car into the shop with a Check Engine light on and an engine that was running horribly.



Doug McAllister  
Under the hood

The long and short of it was some teeth stripped off the belt and it slipped, causing the engine to get out of time. My client was fortunate that belt did not break because this would have caused catastrophic engine failure. In this case the driver got very lucky; he did not need a tow and he didn't ruin the car.

As I mentioned last week, most of us intend to keep our cars for a long while and the key to that is good maintenance. If you don't ignore the service schedule or your trusted mechanics recommendations, you can expect many miles of trouble-free driving from your vehicle.

Q. What can happen to my car after I hit a giant pothole?  
A. It seems that the roads are one big pothole these days. This winter really took its toll on most of the roads I travel and it is hard to miss some of these potholes.

If you hit a big enough one, you may blow out your tires and the choice will be simple — you will need a tow in to the shop and the necessary repairs performed. You may hit one that really jars you but the car seems to drive OK.

After hitting a jarring pothole, I recommend you bring your car in to make certain that you have not damaged the sidewall of the tire or bent the wheel. This can be on the inside of the wheel where you can't see it. The last thing you want to be doing is driving around on a damaged tire. After this pothole season is over it would probably serve you well to get a wheel alignment. This will promote proper tire wear and will conserve fuel.

• Visit Douglas Automotive at [douglasautomotive.com](http://douglasautomotive.com). Send questions to [underthehood@dailyherald.com](mailto:underthehood@dailyherald.com).

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### Auto briefs

#### Jiffy Lube to support wounded veterans

For every customer who brings in their vehicle for service March 20-22, participating Jiffy Lube service centers will donate \$1 to the Wounded Heroes Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing support to military families and returning veterans. Jiffy Lube will also be giving free coupon books, which include discounts on an oil change and ancillary services.

