



A RAVishing Regeneration

by Ian Lamming

OFF-ROADERS underwent a major transformation when Toyota unleashed the original RAV4.

Until that point they were made of girders and enjoyment was limited to getting back home in one piece.

Then arrived this smaller SUV, which had GTI pretensions including sharp handling and decent performance; it was a revelation.

Since those glorious days RAV has had a number of Dr Who makeovers resulting in the fourth generation hitting the roads now. And like our favourite time lords, each one seems better than the one it replaces.

The latest regeneration is the most radical yet as RAV adopts the corporate look of the rest of the range, all sharp and edgy, nice.

The waistline is raised the front and back ends go all angular with tricked-up lighting - the Toyota really does stand out from the crowd with its 21st century looks.

The interior is also a marked improvement with a thoroughly modern dash and centre console. The whole thing just oozes quality and the carefully placed leather is a nice touch.

The obligatory touch screen is easy to use, especially the satnav element and the Bluetooth, and it serves to hone further my fast-becoming ambidextrous nature. There is

more space in the cabin and the boot and the split rear seats allow for long loads to be accommodated including the all-important Christmas tree.

It's all very impressive but it is when you get under way that you realize just how good the RAV4 is.

The 2.2 litre turbo diesel is incredibly refined. Whistling along the highway there is no noise or vibration, just seamless power and decent economy.

Head over the Stang and the motor digs deep to climb the side of ever-increasingly steep hills while the slick six speed gearbox comes into play to keep the RAV on the boil.

After weeks of driving leviathans the RAV is so much more manageable. It is sharp and composed, positive and controlled. It romps through the Dales tackling the switchbacks with aplomb and gripping the asphalt with its sophisticated all wheel drive.

This overall sharpness is also a blessing around the streets of town and city and the reverse parking camera makes parking a doddle.

The SUV market is brimming with models as the public's love of all wheel drive continues. Toyota has always been at the top of this particular game and the latest RAV4 will ensure that it will remain so for years to come.

Fact File

Toyota RAV4

Engine: 2.2 turbo diesel

Power: 148BHP

0-62mph: 9.6 secs

Top speed: 118mph

Combined miles per gallon: 49.6

Transmission: six speed manual

Insurance: 29E

CO2 g/km: 149