

**The new C8 Corvette might be good news for your wallet.**

PAGE 2



**New Year's resolutions for the road**

PAGE 3



**A new Alfa Romeo SUV on the way**

PAGE 2



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TEST DRIVE

## Just Hatched: Next-Gen Corolla

### 2019 Toyota Corolla Hatchback XSE

DAN LYONS | text and photos  
Special to the Times Union

The first time I sat down inside this week's test car, I was surprised to find that it had three pedals. Much as I enjoy them, manual transmissions in cars have become increasingly rare over the years.

How rare? We've just closed the book on 2018. I'll bet that I could count the total number of stick shift cars that I've tested in the past year on the fingers of one hand — even if I was a Disney character!



Once commonplace, manual transmissions have receded into two last bastions of resistance: Sports car and economy car drivers seem to be the only ones interested in doing it

yourself, shift-wise.

Our test subject this week comes from the latter category. The six-speed manual in the Toyota Corolla Hatchback I drove this week has an easy shift action, and a light clutch. A push-button hold function effec-

**2019 Toyota Corolla Hatchback XSE**

MSRP: \$21,090 · As tested: \$24,325 (including \$920 in delivery fees)

tively removes the risk of rollback when you lift off the brake. Even on an incline, you can leisurely let out the clutch, with no worries about the (explicative optional) driver behind you, who stopped his car a coat of paint behind yours at the light. Those who won't be persuaded to take matters into their own hands, shift-wise, may of course opt for an automatic.

The standard six-speed transmission can be replaced



**THE 2019 TOYOTA COROLLA HATCHBACK XSE** is more powerful than last year's model, with a new 2.0L four-cylinder engine that makes 168 horsepower. EPA listed fuel economy is 28/37/31 mpg (manual), 30/38/33 (automatic).

by an automatic for an additional \$1,100. The CVT is a new design. A fixed, first "launch" gear transitions into a belt-and-pulleys CVT, with 10 simulated gears. The Corolla's CVT also features a Sport mode and paddle shifters. While reading up on this car, I noticed that Toyota has recently issued a safety recall on some of the early production, CVT-equipped Corolla Hatchbacks. About 3,400 cars were impacted, but Toyota tells me that the CVT-equipped cars available at dealerships now are not involved in this recall.

Auto or manual, the transmission connects to an also-new engine. The 2.0L four-cylinder engine makes 168 horsepower and 151 lb.-ft. of torque. This is an increase over the engine it replaces (+31 and +25,

respectively, vs. the outgoing 1.8-liter four). The car has adequate power for all normal driving situations, but not a lot left over, so high demand situations require advance planning. The engine's horsepower peak arrives at 6,600 rpm, and the torque peak is 4,800 rpm. This means that the motor needs to be wound out to do its best work, and that there's not a lot of torque available at initial roll off. The manual transmission is handy for holding a given gear to wring out the power when needed, and a little feathering of the clutch smooths takeoffs from a dead stop.

EPA estimates for fuel economy place a 2019 Corolla Hatchback in XSE trim like my test car at 28/37/31 with a stick, and 30/38/33 with the automatic. I recorded 27 miles per gallon during my drive.

*Continued on page 2*

It is as it's designed to be: A fun, frugal small car... and ride quality is good for its size.

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