



LUXURY. PERFORMANCE. STYLE.

2005 Scion tC
Starting MSRP \$16,000

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Test Drives

Scion Nails Young-Buyer Bull's Eye

What Target is to discount shopping, the Scion tC is to entry-level coupes: sleek design, loads of features and a level of quality unexpected for the price.

By Nick Kurczewski

The 2005 Scion tC is surprisingly roomy for a compact coupe and has a number of features you'd expect only in top-of-the-line luxury vehicles — the panoramic glass roof being one of them. A supercharger, which will be available as a dealer-installed option this fall, promises to elevate the peppy, but far from tire-burning, performance.

Scion is Toyota's new youth-oriented brand, which launched throughout the U.S. in June 2004. Its strategy hinges on offering head-turning style, tons of options and Toyota's legendary reliability, all at an affordable price. The fact that Scions can be customized with dozens of options is one of the most appealing aspects for young buyers — and the biggest source of profit for Scion dealers.

Available options include some things that most adults might balk at — like amber or blue interior neon light kits — and some they'd gladly take for their son or daughter — seat-mounted and side-curtain airbags. Furthermore, Scion doesn't limit things by grouping options into expensive packages, which is a major advantage over nearly every other manufacturer.



The company hopes to soon increase the available options to as many as 100, including new performance-related items, says Mark Templin, who heads Scion. Also appealing is the brand's no-haggle pricing policy, pioneered by Saturn, which gives solace to buyers leery of high-pressure sales people.

Scion executives want to maintain annual production of the entire lineup, which includes the xA and xB along with the tC, under 120,000 to keep interest on the boil. They feel that selling more than that risks diluting the brand, making it too mainstream to appeal to trend-setting buyers. As part of this strategy, dealers have a 12-day supply of cars — a minuscule number considering that the industry average is

roughly three months, Templin says.

However, don't be fooled into thinking that Scion has carved itself a niche among young consumers by relying solely on hype or clever marketing. The cars are undeniably unique and include many standard features that other vehicles in this price range only offer as options, if at all. In the tC coupe, which was released last summer, this includes anti-lock brakes, 17-inch alloy wheels, power windows and door locks, a knee airbag for the driver and a tilting and sliding glass sunroof that stretches all the way to the rear window.

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Exterior

The tC looks nothing like the stubby Scion xA hatchback or the boxy Scion xB wagon. Its slab-sided shape is distinctly modern, if not progressive. Elements of luxury vehicles lurk in the details. There are hints of BMW in the headlamps and C-pillar design, and the protruding grill looks like something from a Volvo.



This is not to imply that the tC is a messy hodgepodge of luxury car cues tacked on to a hatchback body. In fact, its looks elicited a deluge of positive response while road testing in the New York metro area, especially from the young early adopters that Scion is so eager to lure into showrooms.

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Interior

The tC's trim appearance belies the fact that it has room to spare for four adults. Its hatchback trunk can swallow at least a weekend's worth of gear for everyone onboard. The glass sunroof imbues a sense of openness in the cabin, which is quite fortunate, considering that black plastic dominates the car's interior. Brightening things up requires a few checkmarks on the options sheet. Chrome shifter knobs, aluminum pedals and two-tone steering wheels are available.



With or without these extras, there's a sense of quality and craftsmanship that exceeds expectations for a car in this price range. New for 2005 are stereo controls mounted on the steering wheel and a \$260 audio option that allows for control of an Apple iPod through the tC's stereo. And because the iPod has rocketed to cult status among young urban dwellers, the availability of this option shows just how in tune Scion is with its target customers.

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Performance

With a 2.4-liter, 160-horsepower, four-cylinder engine, the tC will keep pace with competitors like the base Acura RSX, Mini Cooper and Volkswagen Golf. It's not overwhelmingly fast, but then it doesn't aspire to be, and it does have ample power for its size. The tC's pep was useful during post-toll-plaza dashes to get into the correct lane on the highway.

Similarly priced hip hatchbacks like the Mini Cooper (\$16,950) and Volkswagen Golf GL (\$16,030) have significantly weaker motors — each with a 45-hp deficit. Conversely, the Honda Civic Si (\$19,320) and base Acura RSX (\$20,275) match the tC's power, but cost thousands more.



The five-speed manual transmission in the tC is first rate — the shift lever feels solid through the gates and the clutch is easy to modulate. But don't discount the smooth and refined automatic transmission, an \$800 option and a good choice for drivers who tackle gridlock on a daily basis.

The tC rides comfortably and quietly. Steering is as linear as the throttle, meaning drivers can turn and accelerate with confidence.

Scion is keeping quiet about the specifics of the forthcoming supercharger, other than saying that it will

bump peak horsepower to around 200 and cost about \$4,000. (See our tC photo gallery for an image of the supercharger installed.)

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Is the tC for You?

Buy This Vehicle If	You want a handsome and economical coupe with a premium look and feel, room for four adults and their stuff and a raft of personalization options.
Keep Looking If	You prefer the convenience of a four-door or absolutely have to win every stoplight drag race, in which case, hold out for the supercharged version coming this fall.
Who Fits?	Amazingly, for a coupe, the answer is four normal-size adults all at once. The rear seats have plenty of head and legroom for average-size adults. The driver's seat is comfortable, with plenty of fore and aft movement, a memory setting and a tilt steering column. However, drivers of all sizes will be annoyed with the large blind spots created by the tC's wide C-pillars.
Options Worth Splurging On	This is the raison d'être of Scion and the options sheet will only get longer in coming months. Personal favorites include the interior neon lighting (\$250) and modestly menacing body kit (\$995). There is also the limited-edition Scion tC Release Series 1.0 — only 2,500 were made — that includes a devilishly red paint job and various cosmetic addenda for an additional \$1,775 over the base price. (See trivia page for more info.)
Closest Competitors	Mini Cooper (\$16,950), Honda Civic Si Hatchback (\$19,320), Volkswagen Golf GL 2.0-liter (\$16,030), Acura RSX (\$20,275)

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Did You Know?



- The tC Release Series 1.0 in "Absolutely Red" (shown above) is the fourth installment of Scion's limited edition packages. Scion's xB wagon has had two Release Series, as has the xA. These special editions feature wild paint colors, with names like "Hot Lava," "Solar Yellow" and "Spectra Blue Mica," along with cosmetic add-ons like larger alloy wheels, billet grills and interiors trimmed to match the exterior paint. Production has ranged from 1,550 (for the xA Release Series 1.0) to 2,500 for the tC edition pictured above.
- Scion has its own record label, called A/V. Through A/V, Scion funds the recording and release of 12-inch vinyl records to help promote emerging hip-hop artists. The records are then distributed to college radio stations and club deejays.
- The tC is based on the platform of Toyota's Avensis sedan, which is available only in Europe and Japan.

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