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Toyota Land Cruiser FJ40 - FJ-Icon TLC's Revived FJ-40

By Kevin McNulty
Photography by Kevin McNulty

The U.S. Army's request for a tough, dependable, military-like vehicle from Toyota was first cast at the manufacturer in the 1950s. Although a military contract between the Army and Toyota never materialized, the first FJ vehicles started rolling off the production lines in 1958. The civilian population quickly accepted the tough utility vehicle because it performed so well in harsh environments.



Production of the FJ-40 spanned 25 years. The classic vehicle has unquestionably become one of the world's favorite off-road vehicles and a legend. Today the Land Cruisers can be readily found in various forms and conditions, but few are as classy as this one. An FJ-40 of this caliber can only be built by a very limited number of shops here in the United States. TLC Inc., in Van Nuys, California, takes the Grand Prize for this re-creation.

Captured Grace

This icon isn't a fully restored Toyota FJ, excluding the original factory frame; it is a brand-new Land Cruiser. The majority of components are built from scratch; everything else is new. The only remaining original component, the frame, has been restored to like-new condition. If you're asking yourself, "can I buy one?" they are in fact available. This particular FJ is a prototype and would probably come with a hefty price tag. The hand-crafted Toyota is the first vehicle produced from scratch by TLC. The owner of TLC, Jonathan Ward, tells us thus far he has out approximately \$185,000 into the design and build. We can only guess at the true value of this Land Cruiser, since Jonathan is quite renowned for his vehicle restoration and build abilities.

Creation of a Masterpiece

The icon is a blend of classic design and modern performance. Behind these timeless lines are countless hours of skilled craftsmanship and a plethora quality components. The frame is based on the original solid Land Cruiser double C-channel boxed-frame construction, reinforced, modified, and powdercoated to enhance rigidity, ride quality, and durability. The all-new steel and 5052 H32 aluminum body captures the original Land Cruiser character but with even greater longevity and resistance to the elements.

The innovative textured-epoxy, polymer-based, marine-powdercoat finish offers aircraft quality with surface protection and easy maintenance. Line-X polyurethane coating provides further corrosion protection and vibration isolation for the underside of the body and cabin floor surfaces. The versatile soft top is tailored in high-quality three-ply German canvas over a steel, custom-built, powdercoated frame structure, and features removable window panels.

Performance to Spare

Resting in the engine compartment is a state-of-the-art, all-new 5.7L Ram Jet 350 designed for performance and ease of ownership. Out of the crate, the GM engine is rated at 350 hp and 400 lb-ft of torque. Special TLC engine mounts were CAD-designed to isolate vibration. An alloy crossflow radiator with GM fan clutch and handcrafted steel shroud helps cool the engine. The engine fits the FJ's power-to-weight ratio for the Cruiser well. Coupled to the fuel-injected V-8 is a full-synco, 1-ton, NV4500 five-speed transmission. Mated to the transmission is a purpose-built Atlas II transfer case. The T-case is geared at a 3.8:1 for Low range (5.0:1 option available) and 1:1 for High range. A custom fuel system with a steel 18-gallon fuel tank with skidplate was fit in the rear.

Trail- & Highway-Friendly

The Icon rests on Dynatrac Dana 60 and 44 hybrid axles. The ring-and-pinion is geared at 4.09:1. The axles will come standard with limited slips; ARB front and rear lockers will be optional. Helping stop the Cruiser are vented and slotted disc brakes on the four corners, controlled by a dual diaphragm, GM-style master cylinder. The suspension is a combination of specially engineered ARB Dakar and Old Man Emu components. The wheelbase is enhanced with extended rear springs, while Old Man Emu gas shocks provide ride comfort.

We feel safe in saying that the Toyota FJ-series vehicles have become, and will always be, held in high regard as classics. The original Land Cruisers were built overseas, so we can't really call them an American legend. But we're sure some future Icon owners will peg TLC's Icon as such.

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