

Road beat: Noticeable improvements to Sonata



The 2015 Hyundai Sonata has been upgraded since the last iteration in 2010. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Hyundai claims the 2015 Sonata is all new. While every body panel has changed and more than a face-lift has occurred, the resemblance to the prior generation is remarkable. Even the chassis dimensions have changed marginally all in the name of refinement and polish. In that respect Hyundai has accomplished its goal of a vehicle that has improved in most every way, so much so that it offers a ride and quiet that was only in an engineer's dream 10 or 15 years ago.

Size-wise there have been changes in every chassis and body

dimension like wheelbase is up 0.4 inches to 110.4 and length has grown by 1.3 inches to 191.1 inches. Width is up by an inch to a wide 73.4 inches, while chassis designers saw fit to widen the track by about the same amount, improving balance, stability and handling.



Specifications

Price \$21,150 to about \$32,500

Engine

Four cylinder inline 16 valve 185 hp @ 6,000 rpm
178 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,000 rpm

Transmission

Six speed torque converter automatic with a semi manual mode

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine with front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 110.4 inches

Length 191.1 inches

Width 73.4 inches

Height 58.1 inches

Track (f/r) 63.1/63.3 inches

Ground clearance 5.3 inches
Cabin volume 106.1 cubic feet
Trunk volume 16.3 cubic feet
Fuel Capacity 18.5 gallons
Weight 3,371 pounds
Steering lock to lock 2.78 turns
Turning circle 35.8 feet
Wheels 17X7 inch alloys
Tires 215/55X17
Co-efficient of drag 0.27
Performance
0-60 mph 7.82 seconds
50-70 mph 4.25 seconds
50-70 uphill 6.56 seconds
Top Speed Beyond sanity
Fuel economy EPA rated at 24/35/28 city/highway/combined.
Expect 27-28 mpg in suburban driving and 37 plus mpg on a level highway at 70 mph.

When the prior generation Sonata was introduced five years ago, it was a bombshell with cutting edge looks and class leading four cylinder performance, never mind an interior that blew away the competition. You can see the evolution from the prior generation. The shape of the new Sonata is uncannily similar, but it is different. You need to study the new body to discover why it is so improved. First, the new aggressive grille has much similarity to the new World Class Genesis. A huge curving body character line has been lightened and made almost straight while the window line has been improved in a similar manner without the curved lower line and a less radical top line. It all fits and flows smoothly without any gimmicks. It certainly matches the effort of the new Genesis.

A side benefit of the redesign was a 3-cubic-foot increase in cabin volume, making the new Sonata a true full size car interior with the largest trunk and interior cabin of any midsize sedan.

Even the Sonata's coefficient of drag has improved from a slick 0.28 to an even slicker 0.27.

Where things haven't changed much is in the engine room. The power comes from the same state of the art 2.4L direct injected, DOHC 16 valve Theta four cylinder engine, now producing 185 hp at a lower 6,000 rpm and 178 peak pounds of twist at a lower 4,000 rpm. Power is sent to the front wheels via a six speed auto cog swapper. The unit operates extremely quietly and with absolute smoothness.

Performance hasn't changed much since the prior generation's intro five years ago as this 2015 unit knocks off 0-60 mph in 7.82 seconds. Passing performance times in simulated 50-70 mph runs on a level highway and a six percent grade were 4.25 and 6.56 seconds respectively which are virtually identical to the (2014) prior generation's times which had times of 7.79, 4.25 and 6.64 seconds respectively. The Road Beat would place the Hyundai mid-pack, but mid-pack in the mid-size sedan class is a good performing automobile. A 1960 performance sedan like a 300 hp 6.4L (389 cubes) Pontiac Bonneville couldn't match this level of performance while drinking at least two to three times more fuel. Boy, do we have it good.

Speaking of drinking fuel, by comparison the Sonata barely sips it, averaging exactly what the EPA says it should, about 28 mpg. EPA predictions are 24/35/28 mpg city/highway/combined. On the highway at 70 mph the Sonata did slightly better at 36.8 mpg with the engine spinning just 2,000 rpm. With the Sonata's 18.5 gallon fuel tank, 600 plus miles on the highway would be a piece of cake, at least for the Sonata. The driver and/or passengers might have to stop earlier.

As with Sonata's performance, fuel economy remains the same compared to the 2014 model. Mention should be made of the new turbo engine, which while producing slightly less hp (245 hp at 6,000), provides more real world performance with less turbo lag and a more responsive, linear power curve.

More improvements have been made to the Sonata's structure and suspension. The use of advanced high strength steel has increased bending and torsional rigidity by about 40 percent. Revised dual lower arm rear suspension (over the prior single arm system) has improved the Sonata's responsiveness, handling and stability. Even overall weight has been pared by a few pounds.

Other improvements include a revised quicker electric power steering rack and when you couple that with the wider track, handling has become a bit sharper almost to the level of a sporting sedan. Most drivers won't notice these changes unless you push the car hard, but it will be noticed in the ride quality. In normal driving, the Hyundai handles easily and beautifully.

Sonata is a quiet, refined automobile. It handles bumps with reduced harshness and a sublimely compliant ride. It could call it almost luxurious (as in near luxury car). It is that quiet and smooth. There is no float. In a drive with a friend, even he remarked about the extremely smooth, quiet ride.

Of course Sonata comes with about every safety acronym in the book and in my Limited tester; blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert and a rearview camera were standard. And the optional Ultimate Package (\$1,500) comes with a lane departure warning system. Braking is also slightly improved with the Sonata's four wheel discs (front ventilated) stopping the Sonata in 40 feet from 40 mph. Part of the improvement is due the Sonata new rear suspension. HID headlights were excellent.



The 2015 Sonata has been improved.

Inside you are greeted with a leather interior with sublime front chairs that are both powered. Everything you touch exudes quality with soft touch trim pieces. Full instrumentation (tach and speedo included) plus a trip computer are standard. The center stack is well done and the controls and touch screen sound system are easy to use. Because there is no engine, wind or road noise and because of its accurate steering, good fuel economy and high comfort level, Sonata is a wonderful long distance over the road vehicle.

It feels like most of that new interior volume can be found in the copious rear seating area. Legroom is huge as is the better than 16 cubic foot trunk.

More good news from Hyundai is pricing. The new Sonata bases \$300 less than last year at \$21,150, plus \$810 for transportation from its Montgomery, Alabama assembly plant. The base price on tested leather Limited is \$26,525. My tester was equipped with the \$3,500 Tech Package which added the panoramic sunroof, Nav, HID lighting and more plus the aforementioned Ultimate Package. Carpeted floor mats were \$125. After the transportation charges the total was \$32,510. You will find the base car will offer most of the virtues of the Limited while the Limited offers a near luxury experience.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At

8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.