

# Road beat: Elantra has comfort over sport



Hyundai continues to improve Elentra. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

You may think a Hyundai Elantra is a middle of the road compact sedan that competes for one of the largest segments in the auto market which includes the likes of Corolla, Civic, Cruze, Mazda 3, Sentra and several more. It's heady competition so you must offer something a bit unique with special qualities.

Hyundai Elantra GT fits that billing. While I have been a fan of its swoopy and edgy styling, the GT adds a bit of sportiness in the hatchback rear end, which also multiplies its utility. It is convenient. While it might not quite have

the stunning styling of the new Mazda 3, it has a bit more performance (over the 3's 2.0L version) and will appeal to those looking for more comfort over sport, although this new GT did acquit itself very well at the drag strip and in the twisties regardless.



### **Specifications**

Price \$19560 to \$25,500 all in

Engine 2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four 173 hp @ 6,500 rpm

154 lb-ft of torque @ 4,700 rpm

Transmission

Six speed Automatic

Six speed manual

Chassis layout

Front transverse engine, front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Length 169.3 inches

Wheelbase 104.3 inches

Width 70.1 inches

Height 57.1 inches

Track (f/r) 61.0/61.5 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Weight 2,855 to 2,983 pounds

Fuel capacity 13.2 gallons  
Cargo capacity (rear seats  
down/up) 51.0/23.0 cubic  
feet

Passenger volume 96.1 cubic  
feet

Steering lock to lock 2.8  
turns

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.308

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 7.57 seconds

50-70 mph 4.55 seconds

50-70 uphill 7.43 seconds

Fuel economy EPA rated  
24/34/28 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 38.1 mpg on the  
highway and 30-31 mpg in  
rural country driving.

While the GT rides on a special European developed chassis exclusive to the GT that has a wheelbase of 104.3 inches, it is two inches shorter than the sedan's wheelbase. Overall length is only 169 inches long making it about 9 inches shorter than the sedan and what could be called a sub-compact in length. Width is the same at 70 inches, but here is the kicker, the cabin volume of the GT is 119 cubic feet making the GT one cubic foot short of being classified as a large car. In other words it has an interior that is bigger than most mid size cars while being 20 inches shorter. The average midsize car is 190 inches.

Instead of the still powerful 1.8L, 148 hp inline four of the standard Elantra and last year's GT, the new GT version gets a 10mm stroking and GDI which brings the boil up to 173 hp at 6,500 rpm and 154 pounds of twist at 4,700 rpm. Now the GT is

showing some GT credentials. The engine has some other features, one worth noting is the adding of some aluminum to the lower engine block reducing NVH and increasing block rigidity by 30 percent. I mention this because this is one of the quietest and smoothest four bangers I have ever encountered.

While a six-speed auto cog swapper is available, my tester had the sportier six-speed manual that has something to be said for it. It shifts so smoothly that upshifting rarely requires using the clutch. You can downshift the same way, but in relaxed driving it takes too long, so the clutch makes it easier. It's as close to warm butter without being yellow.

Performance of this 2,900 pound sporty ride is also commensurate with the specs as several 0-60 mph runs averaged 7.57 seconds. Passing performance (50-70 mph) stopped the chondex at 4.55 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade lasted 7.43 seconds. Certainly significantly better than your average compact and the standard 148 hp Elantra and a smidgen better than the Elantra Coupe with the 173 hp engine tested a few months ago (times were 7.84, 4.80 and 7.73 seconds). While the engine is revvy and smooth, even at or near redline (about 7,000 rpm) it the engine feel a bit soft, but it isn't. It will pull in the top three gears from about 2,000 rpm and acceleration is brisk at that rpm in the lower gears. Hit 4,700 (peak of the torque curve) and it pulls smartly in any gear.

Fuel economy is EPA rated at 24/34/28 mpg city/highway/combined. The GT does about 10 percent better with 38.1 mpg at 70 mph on a level highway. Overall fuel economy averaged 30.6 mpg with very little time on the highway. Interestingly, the numbers for the Elantra Coupe discussed above were essentially identical. In real life testing highway mileage for the more powerful-engined GT is the same as the 148 hp engine Elantra as it should be, but overall driving might suffer by an mpg or two. The GT is a

guilt free sporty compact car with a dash of style and utility. Also contributing to the GT's fuel economy is a 0.30 co-efficient of drag.

Suspension is compact car standard MacPherson struts up front with a torsion beam bringing up the rear. Gas filled shocks and coils are at all four corners. With the Style package (\$2,550) besides the upgraded 17 inch alloys and wider (215/45) tires, the components are sport-tuned which means springs and shocks are a bit stiffer and have different ratings which adds some firmness and stability in the corners. I still felt the package was a bit soft, but the cornering power was still very good. This GT will still out corner the non GT Elantra with no ride penalty.

That's what endears the GT to the regular driver, its adds to its handling with no loss of ride quality or quiet. The GT gives you that quiet, smooth ride you look for without any detriment to handling. Even outside the car, the engine is almost inaudible. On the highway at 70 mph the engine revs a bit high at 2,700 rpm (300 more rpm than the automatic) but the cabin remains totally free from engine, road and/or wind noise.

Braking is by large four-wheel discs with all the acronyms and does an admirable job at arresting foreign progress in the benchmark of 40 feet. Also in its complement of safety devices are seven airbags and most every other acronym including TPMS. But one thing missing especially considering this GT was a manual, was Hill Start Assist which prevents rolling backward when starting out on a hill. Yes, it's a crutch, but it's a nice crutch.



The vehicle goes from 0-60 mph in 7.57 seconds.

Inside is a very high quality leather interior which is part of the style package. Interior quality is excellent giving one the feeling of luxury. It is amazing how Hyundai in 20 years has vaulted to near or at the top of the class in quality.

Seats are comfortable (driver's is power, part of the Style pack) with plenty of rear seat leg room. Instrumentation is clear and complete with a big tach and speedo plus ancillary gauges and a full trip computer. All appointments are top quality. Cabin volume is huge including 51 cubic feet with the rear seats down and 23 cubic feet with the rear seats up. That's more truck room than a Crown Vic or a Towncar.

Pricing for this ride is a bargain at \$18,750 plus \$810 for the boat ride from Ulsan, Korea. I would add the Style pack for \$2,550 and the sort of obligatory nicely monogrammed carpeted floor mats (\$125) bring to total to \$22,235. That's a lot of car that has an aversion to gas stations. And standard equipment includes a five-year/60,000 mile bumper-to-bumper warranty plus a 10-year/ 100,000 miles powertrain warranty. Hyundai certainly puts their money where their mouth is. Now this is value.

*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.*