

# Road beat: Hyundai impressively revamps Azera



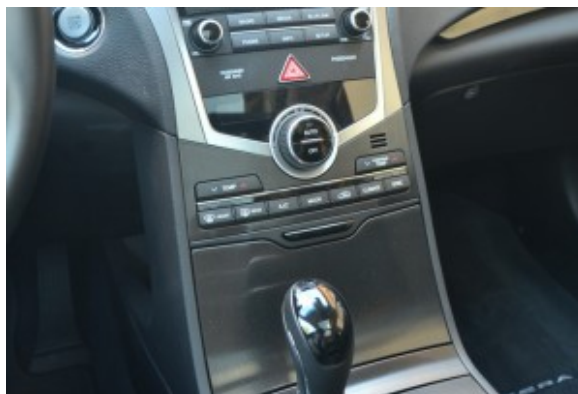
The latest Azera model from Hyundai is dramatically improved. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Never being a fan of the Azera, mainly because it was not attractive, has changed by about 180 degrees, with a new, fifth generation model. The prior generation, which was a follow on to the third generation known as the XG 300-350 (a car of real value), must have been designed by a competitor because it wasn't exactly the belle of the ball.

But the fifth generation Azera changed everything. Sales have been slow to recover as auto experts think the intro in 2008 of the not much more expensive rear-wheel drive luxury Genesis

made Hyundai Azera buyers quickly step up the few bucks to the superior Genesis.



### **Specifications**

Price (with destination)  
\$34,895 to about \$39,220

### **Engine**

3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 293  
hp @ 6,400 rpm  
255 ft.-lbs. of torque @  
5,200 rpm

### **Transmission**

Six speed torque converter  
automatic with paddle  
shifters

### **Configuration**

Transversely mounted front  
engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 112.0 inches  
Length 193.7 inches  
Width 73.2 inches  
Height 57.9 inches  
Track (f/r) 63.1/63.1 inches  
Weight (18"/19" wheels)  
3,684/3871 pounds  
Ground clearance 5.4 inches  
Fuel Capacity 18.5 gallons

Cabin interior volume 107.0  
cubic feet  
Trunk volume 16.3 cubic feet  
Turning circle 36.5 feet  
Steering lock to lock 2.9  
turns  
Wheels (std/opt)  
18X7.5/19X8.5 inch alloys  
Tires (std/opt)  
245/45X18/245/40X19 inch  
radials

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 6.24 seconds  
50-70 mph 3.35 seconds  
50-70 mph uphill 4.97  
seconds  
Top speed Way beyond sanity  
Fuel economy EPA rated at  
19/28/22 mpg  
city/highway/combined.  
Expect 35 mpg in highway  
driving at legal speeds and  
24 mpg overall in  
suburban/rural driving.

But this relatively new generation changes everything. What a great car. Sure it is front-wheel drive, but it is a non-issue. It is so well controlled that 99.9 percent of the time you will never know except for snowy conditions and then you will thank yourself for the front-wheel drive. Torque steer is deminimus, never thought about during the entire test with plenty of aggressive driving.

To improve the overall design, Hyundai designers went to the Fluidic Sculpture studio and came out with a pretty package with lines similar to the Sonata, but in some ways better. The front end is signature Hyundai, but the sides of the body are

smooth with two stylish character lines especially above the rear quarter panel with perhaps its signature arrow. Nice touch. But with its long window line and proportions, you would have to call the Azera downright pretty. Many people seeing the car asked what it was saying it was sure stylish and pretty. Many didn't know it was a Hyundai.

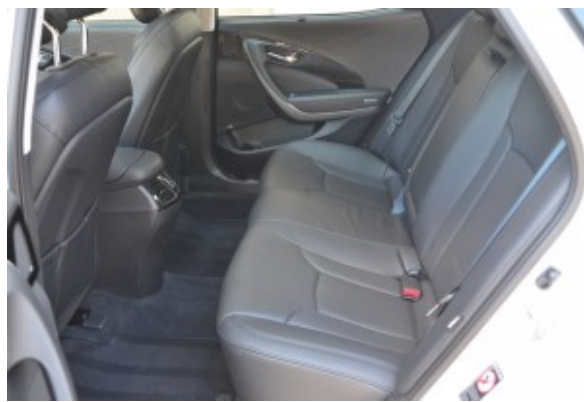
Having a long 112-inch wheelbase, a length of 194 inches and a width of 73 inches put the Azera into a large midsize class. But its voluminous interior dimensions place it squarely in the EPA large car class with a total interior volume of 123-cubic-feet, including a massive 16-cubic-foot trunk. This is a roomy, very comfortable sedan; so much so it could double for limo duty. But it doesn't drive like a limo nor a Buick (which also don't drive like Buicks anymore, either).

Powering the Azera is a choice of one silky, trick 3.3L, DOHC, 24 valve, direct injected V-6. Knocking down 293 thoroughbreds at 6,400 rpm plus a peak 255 pounds of twist at 5,200 rpm (meaning this engine is already making 252 hp at peak torque rpm), this engine pulls strong from off idle right to redline of about 6,600 rpm. Power flows to the front wheels via a six speed auto cog swapper which you can by sliding the shifter over control manually for you boy racers out there. I did use the manual feature going down a long grade.

Azera is almost the mechanical twin of the Kia Cadenza and its performance is similar, matching the Cadenza times within a tenth of a second plus or minus, but its fuel economy was a bit better by an mpg. Zero to 60 mph averaged an excellent near world-class 6.24 seconds. Passing numbers also confirm the Azera's rapid acceleration with a 50-70 mph passing run lasting just 3.35 seconds and the same test up a six percent grade only slowing the Azera to 4.97 seconds.

As to passing gas stations, the Azera is also exemplary. EPA rates the Azera at 19/28/22 mpg city/highway/combined. But the Azera exceeds those numbers by at least 10 percent in real

world driving. Overall the Azera averaged 24.4 mpg and on the highway at 70 mph in a two-way run 35.6 mpg was the norm with the engine spinning 1,850 rpm at 70 mph. This may explain the 2 mpg better 70 mph fuel economy of the Azera over the Kia. While the transmission ratios are essentially the same the final drive ratio is lower in the Azera dropping 70 mph rpm by 150 and that would improve fuel economy. That would also explain why the passing numbers for the Kia are about a tenth of a second quicker over the Azera. Two mpg is significant; a tenth of a second is not.



The roominess of the Azera is like sitting in a limo.

Handling is enhanced by state of the art fully independent suspension in all corners with Sachs ASD shocks and stab bars at ends. And those creds are improved by the Limited's upgraded 19 inch alloys shod with super low profile and wide 245/40/19 rubber. Add in a 63 inch track front and rear and you should have a machine that can change directions with ease and the Azera does. Body roll is reasonably well controlled and the quick 2.9 turns lock to lock steering while slightly numb makes it easy to be aggressive and confident when the road bends, no matter how tight and frequent. Azera can straighten the road and keep your line with a minimum of fuss. Turning circle is a tight 36 feet.

Ride quality is superb. It eats road imperfections of any kind for breakfast, lunch, dinner and dessert plus any snacks you

want to throw in. And it doesn't gain weight. It is also extremely quiet, even with those low profile tires. The engine spins at 70 mph only 1,850 rpm and nothing can be heard unless you have back seat drivers which is easy to solve. Stop the car, unlock their doors and ask them to leave. They won't find a better ride. They will willingly be quiet.

Braking performance was good stopping in 42 feet from 40 mph (large four-wheel discs with ABS). Having nine airbags including rear side impact bags, plus an alphabet soup of safety acronyms, HID headlights that turn night into day, Hyundai leaves nothing out, down to the rear view camera.

If you don't like soft, buttery leather, don't buy this car. It's the only way it comes. Even the standard Azera is so equipped along with things like heated front and rear seats with the fronts having additional ventilation. The IP is superb with everything you need like a trick tach and a trip computer and more. There is only one easy to use Infinity sound system, no upgrades required by the audiophile. Trust me this one is good, really good.

If there is an issue, I found the gorgeous front seats not to fit me well. Lower back support was lacking even with the adjustable bolster at maximum. It wasn't low enough. Of course I should mention that during my week with the Azera, I was recovering from a severe lower back spasm. Blame it on me. Rear seating is a limousine and those rear quarter windows make the space feel even larger and the vehicle design better looking.

Now here is the deal. A base Azera stickers for \$34,000 plus \$895 for the boat from Asan, Korea, and the car is fantastically equipped. My tester was the moderately upgraded Limited stickered for \$38,200 and the only option was floor mats for \$125. With the limited you get a panoramic moonroof. My dermatologist says no to that so I might have to keep it closed, but the extra filtered light is nice. With the

Limited you get the 19-inch wheels and tires, but the standard Azera is no slouch there, as it gets great looking 18-inch alloys plus 245/45 series rubber that is also very capable. Limiteds also get the HID lights, lane departures warning and forward collision warning and some other small items, but otherwise they are the same. At \$38 large it is a phenomenal deal. At \$34 large for the base Azera which is \$2,000 LESS than a lesser equipped Camry V-6 tested a couple of months ago, it maybe the value sedan of the decade. Maybe Azera should be spelled v-a-l-u-e. And they still throw in for free a 100,000 mile power train warranty.

*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.*