

Road Beat: Hyundai Santa Fe Sport top of its class



The 2017 Hyundai Santa Fe Sport may be the best in its class. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

First with respect to the Santa Fe Sport is its classification. While it rides on a 106.3-inch wheelbase, which is 1 to 3 inches longer than the RAV4 and CR-V, it is a half an inch shorter than the Nissan Rouge and identical to the CX-5 wheelbase at 106.3 inches. But Santa Fe Sport is at least a couple inches longer (185 inches) and perhaps an inch or 2 wider (74 inches) than the aforementioned competition. But the EPA classifies them all as small SUVs.

Then there is the question of competition. Is the new class leader in small SUVs the new Santa Fe Sport, taking over from

the Mazda CX-5? In a one-word answer, yes, as you will understand below.

While the CX-5 has world class looks, the continued refinement of the SF Sport makes it the new equal in this department. The SF Sport new front end is aggressive, well proportioned, tying in the headlights well in the new hexagonal shape of the grille and creating and implementing the theme or signature grille for most every new Hyundai. It is stunning. And then there is the dynamic window line putting the SF Sport in motion standing still while maintaining perfect proportions between the two box design of all SUVs. This is one good looking ride.

Powering my SF Sport Ultimate was a 2.0L four-cylinder turbo sporting a, high for a turbo, 10:1 compression ratio. Because of that there is almost no turbo lag. Being state of the art, it features DOHC, 16 valves and direct injection. Producing 240 hp at 6,000 rpm and a whopping 260 pounds of twist between 1,450 to 3,500 rpm means this engine makes prodigious hp at very low rpms, like about 100 hp at just 2,000 rpm and about 150 hp at just 3,000 rpms. Most normally aspirated 2.0L engines are lucky to make 150 hp even when wound out to 6,000 rpm. My tester drove only the front wheels through a six-speed torque converter auto tranny.



Specifications

Price \$25,350 to about \$40,000

Engine

2.0T DOHC, 16 valve,
directed injected
turbocharged inline four 240
hp @ 6,000; 260 lb.-ft. of
torque @ 1,450-3,500 rpm

Tranny

Six Speed torque converter
automatic

Configuration

Front mounted, transverse
mounted engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 185.0 inches

Width 74.0 inches

Height (w/o/with roof rack)
66.1/66.5 inches

Track (f/r) 64.1/64.5 inches

Weight 3,949 pounds

GVWR 5,004 pounds

Fuel capacity 17.4 gallons

Cargo capacity (behind front
seats/second row) 71.5/35.4
cubic feet

Wheels 19X7.5 inch alloys

Tires 235/55X19

Tow capacity 3,500 pounds
with trailer brakes

Steering lock to lock 2.95
turns

Turning circle 35.8 feet

Co-efficient of drag 0.34

Performance

0-60 mph 7.17 seconds

50-70 mph 3.51 seconds

50-70 up a steep grade 6=7

percent) 5.65 seconds
Top Speed Well into triple
digits
Fuel economy EPA rated
20/27/23 mpg
city/highway/combined. I
recorded 27-28 mpg overall
with 50 percent in rural
country driving and 10
percent freeway. Highway
mileage should average 33
mpg at legal speeds.

Performance was outstanding equaling the CX-5 in its 0-60 mph run at 7.16 seconds (CX-5 ran a 7.17). And what turbo lag there was cost me a tenth or two off the line. But it was in passing performance where the rubber meets the road and turbo lag is non-existent. Fifty-70 mph passes averaged 3.51 seconds on level ground and up a steep grade that time only slowed to 5.65 seconds. Compared to the CX-5, the SF Sport was a half a second and a second quicker respectively in each performance parameter. The SF Sport will get it done in the flatland or in the Sierras. This is without question the best performing small SUV. And the ability continues in the mountains as the turbo SF Sport will continue to make full hp even as the altitude climbs where normally aspirated engines start to wheeze a bit. (For every 1,000 feet of altitude a normally aspirated engine loses three percent of its hp. At Echo Summit, 7,382 feet of altitude, your 240 hp normally aspirated engine would be down 22 percent in hp or about down to 187 hp.).

But here is where it gets interesting, fuel economy. EPA rates the SF Sport at 20/27/23 mpg about average or slightly below average for its class even though Hyundai has improved the SF Sport's efficiency by an mpg or two over the 2016 model. However, in my testing it did way better than the EPA says.

With the smart cruise control set at 70 mph on a two-way run it averaged a constant 33.2 mpg and if that isn't enough during the entire test that included all kinds of driving, but perhaps 50 percent in rural country driving, the SF Sport averaged 27-28 mpg. The reality is it basically equaled the non turbo CX-5 while besting it on the highway by 1.5 mpg. The SF Sport is having your cake, eating it, too and never getting fat. However, this FWD model tips the scales at a not so svelte 3,949 pounds (AWD will add about 150 pounds) and the co-efficient of drag is 0.34.

So what about handling which is the forte of the CX-5. Hyundai designed the SF Sport as a state of the art automobile so it comes with four-wheel independent suspension (MacPherson struts up front, multi-link in the rear, gas filled shocks, coils in all four corners plus stab bars at each end). In addition, the SF Sport gets wider 19X7.5 inch alloys and more generous rubber at 235/55X19 inch rubber. Other creds are 2.96 turns of the electrically powered rack from lock to lock, a front and rear track of 64 inches and a 36 foot turning circle.

All this adds up to one super nimble SUV with oodles of cornering power, good feedback, and balance, the kind of handling you expect from a good sports sedan or coupe. It is a point and shoot SUV with limited body roll, understeer or even head tossing, certainly equal to the CX-5.

But where we separate the two is in ride quality and that has to do with perceived noise and obvious smoothness. The SF Sport is the smoothest and quietest small SUV the Road Beat has ever tested. It is uncanny. Even on coarse roads noise is extremely subdued as the engine rpms are just 2,000 at 70 mph. There is no wind noise as well. This SF Sport would be a superb road vehicle, it has a supple and very compliant ride that is slightly firm, big cargo capacity, room for five, plenty of performance plus over 30 mpg. And the coup de gras is the larger 17.4-gallon fuel tank.

Brakes are strong with the ventilated front binders being over a foot in diameter. In this top of the line Ultimate is every electronic aid. ABS, TCS, etc is standard as well as LED adaptive lighting that turns night into day and a Multiview system that shows everything around the car when in a tight situation. Lane departure warning and auto emergency braking are part of a Tech package costing \$1,550.

Inside are comfortable leather seats and a well-organized instrument panel. Tach and speedo are front and center separated by the trip computer/info center. The center stack is well laid out as well as the sound system which can be mastered in five minutes.

Being a couple of inches longer and wider than the rest of the class adds to the SF Sport. Instead of about 65 cubic feet of cargo volume behind the front seats, the SF Sport will swallow almost 72 cubic feet and about exactly half that amount behind the second row seating.

Pricing for this top of the line SF Sport FWD Ultimate starts at \$38,500 and with the Tech package, \$125 bucks for fancy floor mats plus \$895 for the rail car from West Point Georgia, the total price of admission is \$39,070. But a SF Sport base with the peppy 185 hp 2.4 inline four, FWD starts at \$25,350 and a 2.0T starts at \$31,700. AWD adds \$1,750 to any FWD model. Santa Fe Sport is now at the top of this class.

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.