

Road Beat: Elantra mpg beats hybrids



Hyundai Elantra Eco may be the best value is a new car today. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Let's get right to the main point of the new Hyundai Elantra Eco, 53 miles to the gallon. I could stop this Road Beat right now, but there is so much more to write about. Yes, 53 miles per gallon was recorded on a level two-way mileage run with the cruise control set at 70 mph. During the run it even crept up to 56 mpg. And this Elantra Eco is not a hybrid.

What did Hyundai do? They installed in the great looking Elantra body a new conventional powertrain, a 1.4L, turbocharged, DOHC, 16 valve direct injected inline four-cylinder engine connected to the second half of this innovative powertrain, a seven-speed dual clutch automated manual transmission driving the front wheels. This tranny is

extremely smooth and super-efficient. The combination creates an incredible high level of efficiency, including its high (for a turbo engine) 10:1 compression ratio.

EPA rates the fuel economy at 32/40/35 mpg, but the Elantra Eco did much better in my 500-mile test. First, in overall driving it averaged 42 mpg. In a two-way run from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe and back the Eco averaged exactly 50 mpg. It averaged 35.2 mpg to SLT and 64.8 mpg on the return trip. Imagine going from SLT to Placerville on a gallon of gas. Hybrids can't do that, but I will try this week in a Prius. I don't know where the EPA got its ratings for the ECO, but it easily averaged 8 mpg better (maybe they left the emergency brake on). And there is so much more to talk about.

Performance with that little 128 hp at 5,500 rpm and 156 pounds of twist engine from 1,400-3,700 rpm engine is astounding. No it's not a dragster, but it out performed a regular Elantra with a 2.0L, 147 hp engine by a full second to 60 mph with a run of 7.85 seconds. And that's with a bit of turbo lag. Passing performance is also near the top of its class with a 50-70 mph time 4.71 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade slowing that time to a very good 6.69 seconds. This Eco really scoots while returning hybrid fuel economy. The slowest thing about the Eco is the downward movement of the fuel gauge indicator.



Specifications

Price \$17,150 to \$27,710

Engine

1.4L 16 valve, DOHC, turbocharged inline four 128 hp @ 5,200 rpm, 156 lb.-ft. of torque at 1,400-3,700 rpm

Transmission

Seven speed dual clutch automated manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 179.9 inches

Width 70.9 inches

Height 56.5 inches

Track (f/r) 61.5/61.9 inches

Ground clearance 5.3 inches

Fuel capacity 14.0 gallons

Trunk capacity 14.4 cubic feet

Passenger cabin volume 95.8 cubic feet

Weight 2,857 pounds

GVWR 3,880

Steering lock to lock 2.7 turns

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Wheels 15 inch alloys

Tires 195/65/15

Coefficient of drag 0.27

Performance

0-60 mph 7.85 seconds

50-70 mph 4.71 seconds

50-70 uphill 6.69 seconds

Top speed Well into triple digits

Fuel economy EPA rated at
32/40/35 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 40-42 mpg in rural
country driving with some
stop and go. 50 plus mpg on
the highway at legal speeds.

Using the same underpinnings as the standard Elantra, meaning MacPherson struts up front and a semi-independent torsion beam in the rear, an electric power rack providing quick steering of 2.7 turns lock to lock, a more rigid chassis using advanced high strength steel and coils and gas shocks in all our corners, this most economical of Elantras will not disappoint in changing directions. It also has a curb weight of just 2,857 pounds combined with a GVWR of 3,880 giving the new Eco a payload of over 1,000 pounds.

While given nimble credentials, don't expect the Eco to be a sports car as it comes with standard 15 inch wheels and skinnier and taller 195/65/15-inch rubber. There should be options to improve those to 16 or 17 inches and 215mm width tires. But notwithstanding its small and minor deficiencies, the Eco is still an adept handler and changes directions as well as other compacts in its class.

Now to more good stuff. This Eco is extremely smooth and quiet. It was noticeable on my first drive, that's how apparent it is. Even with that small engine, it still runs at a low 2,200 rpm at 70 mph. There is no road and/or wind noise. The benefit of those taller tires is a quality ride absorbing the smallest of road imperfections along with the biggest bumps with no float. This car is amazing.

Safety is also not compromised. Braking is strong even with standard 11-inch ventilated discs in front and 8-inch drums in the rear. Many manufacturers of lighter compacts also come standard with small rear drum brakes as the front brakes do 80

percent of the stopping. An alphabet soup of safety acronyms is standard such as ABS, ESC, TC, EBD and more. Seven airbags are standard and things like blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert (standard), lane departure warning, lane keep assist and more are available.

Inside is a comfortable interior with good seats and a clear instrument panel with a big tach and speedo separated by a center information center/trip computer so you can see your astounding fuel economy for yourself. The center stack is intuitive and easy to operate. No college degree required. It has the same mid-size car interior as all the other Elantra models, big. And don't think everything on the inside is hard plastic, it's not. Soft touch does abound and the seating materials are quite nice. Nothing cheap about this car.

Now for the *piece d' resistance*, the sticker price of this Eco was just \$20,650 plus \$835 for the train ride from Montgomery, Ala. My tester had no options except for the obligatory floor mats for \$125 (my tester's total was \$21,610). But there are plenty of packages available including all the safety stuff mentioned above. But standard equipment on this \$21K Elantra Eco includes blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert, rearview camera and even heated front seats. The base Eco is very well equipped making it a real deal (power windows, mirrors, great radio SiriusXM, etc., all standard). It is not a cheap car, but a cheap price. The Eco is a much more sensible purchase than any hybrid and has substantially better performance, almost the same fuel economy and costs substantially less. It may be the best value is a new car today. And then there is the standard 10-year/100,000-mile 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.