

Road Beat: 2017 Hyundai Santa Fe, another winner



Hyundai Santa Fe is one of the better looking crossover utility vehicles on the market. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Recently voted Full Size CUV (crossover utility vehicle) of Texas, the Hyundai Santa Fe is hardly full size in its exterior dimensions. It rides on a mid-size 110-inch wheelbase and Santa Fe's length is a mid-size 193 inches. Width is a manageable 74 inches and with its AWD capability it tips the scales at a svelte 4,169 pounds.

And it still packs a total interior volume of over 160 cubic feet, which is in full size territory. Most full size SUVs weigh a 1,000 pounds more, and are at least 10 inches longer

but have little if any more room. Santa Fe is a home run in the size versus utility comparison and has three full rows of seating.

Santa Fe is also a homerun in the looks department from its signature grille to its rear bumper. It is one good looking ride with perfect proportions in the sleek design and window line. There are no wasted creases in the metal to obscure or detract from its beautiful lines and shape beyond its diminutive size. It is smooth and easy on the eyes. Coefficient of drag is a low for an SUV 0.34.

With the “full-size” Santa Fe you get a choice of one engine, a 3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 cranking out 290 hp at 6,400 rpm along with 252 pounds of twist at 5,200 rpm (according to the hp/torque equation where one pound of torque is equal to exactly one hp at 5,252 rpm means at peak torque rpm – 5,200 – the engine is developing 250 hp). While there is no choice in powerplants, why would you want a different unit as this is one of the best V-6s in production. It is absolutely silky smooth and makes power far beyond its diminutive size. It drives all four wheels with the AWD option (\$1,550 and buy it) through a six -speed torque converter auto cog-swapper. A couple of times it had trouble making up its mind in selecting which gear to use, but otherwise it is smoother and slicker than your proverbial greased pig.



Specifications

Price Santa Fe Limited

Ultimate AWD \$41,150 plus
\$895 destination

Engine

3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 290
hp @ 6,400 rpm

252 ft.-lb. of torque @
5,200 rpm

Transmission

Six speed automatic with
manual mode

Configuration

Transverse mounted front
engine/FWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 110.2 inches

Length 193.1 inches

Width 74.2 inches

Height 66.5 inches

Track (f/r) 64.1/64.5 inches

Weight 4,169 pounds

GVWR 5,622 pounds

Fuel capacity 18.8 gallons

Steering lock to lock 2.95
turns

Turning circle 36.9 feet

Wheels (std/opt)

18X7.5/19X7.5 alloys

Tires (std/opt)

235/60X18/235/55X19

Interior volume (2nd row
up/down, 3rd row up)

40.9/80.0,13.5 cubic feet

Performance

0-60 mph 6.84 seconds

50-70 3.65 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 5.68
seconds

Top speed governed at 130
mph
Fuel economy EPA rated
17/22/19 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 23-24 mpg in rural
and suburban driving and
30-31 mpg on a level highway
at legal speeds.

Getting down the road is quite an easy affair for the Santa Fe with beaucoup power from its sublime powertrain. It knocks off 0-60 mph in an effortless 6.84 seconds and backs that very high performance elapsed time with simulated passing times from 50-70 mph of 3.65 seconds and the same run up a steep grade (6-7 percent) of 5.68 seconds. That is getting it done.

But here is where it gets interesting. The EPA says the Santa Fe should return 17/22/19 mpg city/highway/combined. My real world testing found those numbers extremely conservative as in a two-way run on a level highway at 70 mph returned 30.7 mpg, or almost nine mpg better than the 22 mpg shown in the EPA testing. Some of that performance is due to Santa Fe's slow turning V-6 which spins at just 1,900 at 70 mph. And other testing showed this not to be a fluke. In a 150-mile round trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe averaging at least the speed limit the Santa Fe averaged 26.6 mpg. Overall the Santa Fe averaged about 23-24 mpg including acceleration testing. Those numbers are obviously far better than the EPA numbers. One other important point is the Santa Fe's large 19-gallon fuel tank allowing for a 500-mile range according to my highway mpg numbers. Maybe the EPA does their testing in the Lincoln Tunnel at 5pm on a weekday trying to go from NYC to New Jersey. What a superb powertrain.

Handling in a tall vehicle benefits from 7.5 inch-wide 19 inch wheels shod with copious 235/55 tires. Suspension is state of

the art four wheel independent with stab bars at both ends plus coils and gas filled shocks in all four corners. Track is very wide at 64 and 65 inches front and rear respectively. Steering is a reasonably quick electric power rack that is 2.95 turns lock to lock creating a turning circle of just 37 feet. So when you are doing the fast tango in the twisties you will find yourself with gobs of cornering power but with slightly numb steering feel. That means you need to pay a bit more attention, but the Santa Fe gets it done when pushed hard. Body roll is well controlled and minimal which also reduces head tossing over uneven terrain. With AWD there is no torque steer as might be felt in the FWD version under extreme conditions, such as a tight corner at full throttle. How often does that happen?

Ride quality is sublime (see above regarding state of the art suspension). It handles big and small road imperfections well. It's quiet is remarkable and there is no wind or road noise. Something of note is the huge weight capacity of this CUV of almost 1,500 pounds with a GVWR of over 5,600 pounds. Some, if not many, light duty half ton pickups don't carry that kind of load. Most mid or full size sedans have payloads of less than a thousand pounds. Notwithstanding its supple ride qualities, Santa Fe is one stout vehicle.

Brakes are large four wheel discs (front ventilated) and they are powerful. Of course it has all the safety acronyms including a couple of new ones, LDW (Lane departure Warning) and AEB (automatic emergency braking). HID head lights are fabulous looking more like the landing lights on a Boeing 747. But with their sharp cutoff, they don't blind the oncoming driver. Those last three items are part of the Ultimate Tech Package (\$2,100).

Internally you will find a comfortable leather interior. Everything is powered, heated or cooled including the passenger's seat, rear seats and steering wheel. Most of the interior is all soft touch and the instrument panel is well

designed with a large speedo and tach flanking the central info center and trip computer. Everything is where you would expect it to be and a five-minute one-time orientation is all that is necessary. Ditto for the sound system and center stack of HVAC controls.

Getting into a Santa Fe is a welcoming experience and almost sanctuary like. Rear seating in my tester was two bucket seats which makes third row seating a breeze. But I prefer the option of a second row semi bench which provides excellent outboard seats with third passenger center seating.

With 80 cubes of volume behind the front chairs there is plenty of room for a major Home Depot or Lowe's run. Even behind the third row there are 13.5 cubes of cargo volume which will easily take your in-laws and their luggage to the airport. Don't mistakenly drive to the FedEx terminal.

Pricing for this extremely loaded Limited Ultimate Santa Fe AWD large mid-size CUV starts at \$41,150 plus \$895 for the boat/truck from Ulsan, Korea. The Ultimate Tech Package (\$2,100) and the obligatory fancy floor mats are \$150 which brings the pre-negotiated price of admission to \$44,295. If you haven't checked out the prices of luxury SUV/CUVs lately, that number on its face appears to be a bargain. And then there is the factory 10-year/100,000-mile warranty to sweeten the deal. It's no wonder Hyundai is on a roll.

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.