

Road Beat: 2017 Hyundai Elantra Sport, emphasis on Sport



The Hyundai Elantra Sport is fun to drive. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Most new vehicles with a sport designation are in name only, but not the Hyundai Elantra Sport, which actually means something with respect to the car so named. The Elantra is a highly competitive, grown-up quality compact and the Sport version definitely adds to the driving experience with a more engaging, dynamic feel.

Instead of just adding dress up “sporty” items like red stitching, aluminum pedal applications and better seat

bolstering, this Sport adds a whole lot more. First, is the thick, leather flat bottom steering wheel, a pleasure to hold, a more business like gauge cluster and a black headliner. But even more important is the Sport drivetrain and significant steering and suspension upgrades.

The Elantra body is in its best rendition yet, sleek, sporty and defined by its aggressive front grille and slick top line (its only 56 inches high). It is a great looking car with a length of 180 inches and a width of 71 inches also giving it a wide stance.

Powering the Elantra Sport is a high-powered version of the 1.6L direct injected turbo inline DOHC, 16 valve four, knocking down 201 hp at 6,000 rpm and 195 pounds of twist from an off idle 1,500 to 4,500 rpm. This is unquestionably the most powerful Elantra ever. Standard is a six-speed manual but for about a grand more you can get it with a seven-speed dual clutch auto cog-swapper. I would go with the seven-speeder even though my tester was an unbelievably smooth pure manual six-speeder. The DCT gets a four mpg higher EPA fuel economy rating. The manual tranny was so smooth, most up shifting could be down without the clutch.



Specifications

Price \$21,650 to about \$26,110

Engine

1.6L DOHC, 16 valve direct

injected turbo inline four
201 hp @ 6,000 rpm,
195 lb.-ft. of torque at
1,500-4,500 rpm

Transmission

Six speed manual
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) 60.8/61.4 inches
Ground clearance 5.5 inches
Fuel capacity 14.0 gallons
Trunk capacity 14.4 cubic
feet
Passenger cabin volume 95.8
cubic feet
Weight 3,042-3,131 pounds
Steering lock to lock 2.6
turns
Turning circle 34.78 feet
Wheels 18 inch alloys
Tires 225/40X18
Coefficient of drag 0.31

Performance

0-60 mph 6.47 seconds
50-70 mph 3.04 seconds
50-70 uphill 4.11 seconds
Top speed Well into triple
digits
Fuel economy EPA rated at

22/30/25 (manual) 26/33/29
(automatic) mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 30-34 mpg in rural
country driving with some
stop and go. 39 mpg on the
highway at legal speeds.

Suspension gets more than just a few tweaks like increased spring and shock rates, a rear stab bar (regular Elantras get front stab bars already, but the Sport front stab bar is thicker) and an entirely new rear suspenders going from a semi-independent coupled torsion beam to a fully independent multilink system. But there is more. Sport also gets a new exhaust system. It is the best sounding four banger in its market class. I didn't know it until it drove away from my home, as inside it's still very quiet. But Sport will certainly let the person you are passing the Sport is something special.

How quick and special; the Sport will scamper from 0-60 mph in 6.47 seconds. The DCT might break into the fives. Fifty to 70 mph simulated passing runs on a level highway required just 3.04 seconds and up a steep grade only slowed that time by a second to a miniscule 4.11 seconds with all runs being done in third gear. This is about the quickest compact ever tested by the Road Beat, a car with a base price of \$21,650. Throttle response is amazing after 1,500 rpm, even in six gear when it will accelerate without much complaint. Very flexible. It is also one of the quietest and smooth four bangers ever encountered. And as mentioned it makes beautiful music on the outside. This sports absolutely rocks. It's a box stock car that would be a blast on a racetrack. More on that below.

Sport is an economy vehicle as well even though the EPA numbers say otherwise at a 22/30/25 mpg city/highway/combined rating. In my first 180 miles of driving a fill-up showed the

Sport achieved 29.4 mpg and that included all performance testing (at least two dozen full throttle runs) and a trip over the Sierras via Highway 50 to Carson City. The mileage for the round trip was 37.6 mpg. At 70 mph on a level highway the Sport averaged 38.6 mpg and a round trip from Placerville to Roseville with moderate stop and go driving and no mileage on a freeway, the Elantra Sport average 34.7 mpg. I would think the DCT would average about three more mpg. No guilt for this high-performance driver.

Handling is also spectacular. You already know about the trick suspension. Wheels are 18 inch alloys shod with big, wide 225/40 series rubber. Add to that one of the best electric steering racks with incredible off and on center feel and an almost like hydraulic feel that is super quick at 2.6 turns lock to lock. Turn in is extremely quick and it responds with cat-like reflexes. Nothing like having great roll control, communicative steering and copious rubber on the ground. Sport gives you all that in spades with light weight (3,042 pounds) and when you couple that with big, down low power, Sport would be a blast on a racetrack. It makes weekday commuting fun and your weekend track days better. All in one package in which you will never have to buy that expensive fuel at the race track. A full tank might outlast your tires. I have had a Genesis Coupe on the track with a 201 hp four banger turbo engine and I think this Elantra Sport would be its equal, easily.

And then there is the firm ride quality, helped by its bank vault like structure. While supple and compliant, it is extremely well controlled, making the ride feel on the firm side, but a good firm, my kind of firm. While I talked before of its raucous exhaust, it is very quiet inside. The engine spins a high 2,700 rpm at 70 mph so it has good six gear power, a seventh gear dropping that to say 2,300 rpm might even make the cabin more serene and improve highway mpg by an mpg or two. But even at 2,700 rpm in sixth gear, there is no

engine, road or wind noise.

Safety of course also makes the Elantra Sport a first place car with all the acronyms including blind-spot detection with the \$2,400 package. Brakes are four wheel discs (enlarged front ventilated with one foot rotors) and they are powerful with a strong pedal.

Another first place for this Sport is in the leather interior and well bolstered seats with red stitching everywhere. Nice. The seats are manually adjustable, however. The exclusive Sport instrument binnacle is a nice touch with a big tach/speedo and center info system. The center stack is a model of simplicity and the NAV system with the Premium Package and bigger eight-inch screen is a great addition.

Trunk is a large 14.4 cubic feet and while the Sport looks like it might have a hatchback design, it isn't. The rear seat is quite usable and comfortable for two, less so for three.

Pricing for this well-equipped Sport begins at a modest \$21,650 plus \$835 for the boat ride from Ulsan, South Korea. The Premium package, which I recommend, adds another \$2,400 and the carpeted floor mats adds another \$135 bringing the total damage to a very reasonable \$25,010. If you opt for the seven speed dual clutch automated manual, which I would also do, that will add another \$1,100. This is the best Elantra yet and easily contends as the best compact right up there with the Mazda 3. Elantra Sport is a truly fun economical driver that can save you money during the week providing superb, fun transportation while also giving you some real weekend exhilaration.

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.