

Road Beat: 2017 Hyundai Ioniq elevates hybrid class



The 2017 Hyundai Ioniq is like saving the best for last. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It's ironic that the new Ioniq is a late entry into what I now call a conventional hybrid. And while it may be late to the party, it might be, no it is, the best of the lot.

It claims to be the most economical hybrid ever. Even though only in certain drives could I achieve those lofty mpg numbers, it is certainly the best-looking car ever designed as a hybrid. And Ioniq will soon offer itself as a pure EV and a pull-in hybrid (PHEV).

Ioniq is a great looking vehicle in its own right, with an

aggressive front end, a sweeping roof and window line, sizable fender flares and strong hips ending in a higher, slight kamm tail. A single character line flows from the rear disappearing into the massive front fender flares. Its wide stance accentuates its muscle at 72 inches on a compact body of just 176 inches on a long 106-inch wheelbase. It stands 56-inches tall. Co-efficient of drag is an incredibly low 0.24.

For such a small car, the Ioniq, even with its 1.5 kWh L-I polymer battery stuffed under the rear seat, has the interior volume of a large car at nearly 123 cubic feet with 26.5 cubes under the roomy hatchback with the rear seats up. It's not just a great looking design, it's clever as well.

Open the driver's door and the first thing that catches your attention is the flat-bottom racing style steering wheel. Nice. I like it already. Please don't get the idea Ioniq is a race car, but it will finish last in most races to the gas station. Under hood combined power systems, a 1.6L, direct injected Atkinson cycle inline four that makes just 104 hp at 5,700 rpm but it has an electric kicker, a 43 hp and 125 pounds of twist electric motor but because of limitations regarding rpm and battery output, the combined motive force directed to the six speed DCT automated manual driving the front wheels is 139 hp.



Specifications

Price

Loaded Limited \$31,460

Powertrain

16 valve, DOHC direct injected inline four 104 hp @ 5,700rpm

109 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm

Electric motor 43 hp

125 lb.-ft.

Combined system hp 139 hp

Battery 1.56 kWh L-I polymer

Transmission

Six speed dual clutch automated manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 176.0 inches

Width 71.7 inches

Height 56.9 inches

Wheels 17X7 inch alloys

Tires 225/45X17

Passenger volume 96.2 cubic feet

Trunk volume 26.5 cubic feet

Weight 3,172 pounds

Fuel capacity 11.9 gallons

Co-efficient of drag 0.24

Performance

0-60 mph 8.91 seconds

50-70 mph 4.56 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 8.60 seconds

Top speed Well into triple digits

Fuel economy EPA rated

55/54/55

city/highway/combined Expect
50-55 mpg in rural country
driving and 55 mpg on the
highway at legal speeds.

Performance is good for a hybrid, handily besting a Prius by a second or two in all categories. Zero-60 mph came up in an average of 8.91 seconds, while passing times from 50-70 mph averaged 4.56 seconds on level ground expanding to 8.60 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. The tranny is very responsive and overall this is a snappy car. Even running pure electric, you can feel the push on your back side. Impressive. And this is the first hybrid with a tach which appears when in Sport mode and manual shifting. It turns just 2,100 rpm at 70 mph but in Sport manual mode it will not run pure electric which it seemed to do all the time in automatic. Many times, Ioniq would cruise at 70 plus mph while cruising down the highway in pure electric.

Fuel economy as rated by EPA standards is 55/54/55 city highway/combined mpg. My highway mileage averaged 54.7 mpg or right at the EPA numbers, but overall fuel economy averaged somewhere between 46 mpg and 58 mpg depending on the type of driving which for me was fairly aggressive as the Ioniq begs to be driven hard. It is responsive. My round trip to Carson City averaged 51 mpg with the run from Carson City to Placerville (4,700 feet to 7,382 feet at Echo Summit and back to 1,800 feet) averaged an amazing 61.5 mpg. I would expect most drivers to achieve 50 mpg or better or about what a Prius returns.

How does this Ioniq drive? One word answer is fun! Not only does it scoot right along with plenty of vigor, it corners like a sports sedan. It flat out handles and it will certainly outperform 98 percent of drivers. Suspension is fully independent, steering is quick and in my Limited version

standard 17 x 7 inch alloys were shod with some serious 225/45 rubber. With a curb weight of under 3,200 pounds it can tango in the twisties. Steering is nicely weighted with good feedback and a crisp turn-in. I flat out enjoyed Ioniq and that's again ironic as it surprised the hell out of me time and time again in its smooth transitions and flat attitude. It certainly delivers everything its fabulous looks inspire.

Of course, Ioniq is church mouse quiet, even the tires. However, you pay a small price for the handling as the ride is not cushy soft but more on the firm side. My kind of ride actually. Almost perfect especially considering the paragraph above. There is no wind noise.

Safety doesn't take a back seat in Ioniq. All the acronyms are present, as are a plethora of airbags, rear view camera, blind stop, lane change assist and HID headlights which are fabulous and are adaptive on low beam, meaning they follow the steering wheel when turning. The \$3,000 Ultimate package also adds automatic emergency braking, lane departure and smart cruise which would sense cars in other lanes in the curves and put the brakes on requiring a canceling and resetting the cruise. A minor annoyance. I am not sure I would opt for the package. I can live without auto braking and a few of the other items.

Inside is a beautiful, quality and purposeful interior. In the Limited leather and most everything else is standard. Seats are on the firm side, but offer good support and comfort, especially for the long haul. Power on the driver's is standard with a two-position memory. Rear seat legroom is copious.

Instrumentation is very complete including the first tach ever in a hybrid. Yeah for Hyundai. I reckon they recognize the sporty nature of this gas sipper. The trip computer is also easy to use and complete. I drove 450 miles and still have an easy quarter tank of gas and it only holds 11.9 gallons. If

the gauge were accurate and perfectly linear, that would be about 50 mpg. Most midsize and above motorcycles can't do that.

Pricing is so good, this is a car you buy for its quality, looks and features and not because it's a hybrid. Figure the hybrid part is a free lunch from an already delicious menu. Sticker on this top of the line Limited is \$27,500 and the boat ride from Ulsan, South Korea, adds an obligatory \$835. If you opt for the Ultimate as in my tester adds another three grand. Now here's the rub, there is a charge of \$125 for the fancy floor mats making the total for my ride \$31,460. This car is a good deal, hybrid or not and perhaps that's the beauty of it. It's like Diet Coke, you drink it for the taste of it.

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.