

Road Beat: Hyundai Elantra sedan brings value

By Larry Weitzman

Hyundai is a mature car company that produces cutting edge cars, vehicles that are world class. The new Hyundai GT is another example of real automotive value in a vehicle that has no negatives, not even a small one. If you wanted a vehicle that is comparable, you would have to look at the Mazda3 five-door, and they are so close, comparisons throughout this Road Beat will occur.

Hyundai's Elantra GT (HGT) is effectively the station wagon version of the Hyundai Elantra sedan. But a lot happens before it gets to the lucky buyer. While the hatchback design is sleeker as with the Mazda3, it is also smaller by a significant amount, with length shrinking about 10 inches to 171 inches, while interior room, volume and practicality all go up. The HGT is about 5 inches shorter than the M3 (Mazda3), a plus for the HGT.

Width is 71 inches, average for this class and HGT stands 58 inches tall, maybe an inch higher than average. But HGT looks sportier than the Elantra sedan, making it the best looking Elantra, especially with its new front end and rakish character lines. I am not yet sold on the rounded rear window line. If there is a difference between the M3 and the HGT, it's in this small aspect of the overall design giving the Mazda3 a slight edge in overall looks. But overall, both cars are great looking vehicles. And the difference may be in the beholder.



Specification

Price \$21,235 to \$27,460 all in

Engine 2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four 161 hp @ 6,200 rpm

150 lb-ft of torque @ 4,700 rpm

Transmission

Six speed automatic

Six speed manual

Chassis layout

Front transverse engine, front wheel drive

Dimensions

Length 170.9 inches

Wheelbase 104.3 inches

Width 70.7 inches

Height 57.7 inches

Track (f/r) 61.1/61.5 inches

Ground clearance 5.9 inches

Weight 3,040 pounds

Fuel capacity 14.0 gallons

Cargo capacity (rear seats down/up) 55.1/24.9 cubic feet

Passenger volume 96.6 cubic feet

Steering lock to lock 2.6

turns

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Wheels 17X7 inch alloys

Tires 225/45X17

Co-efficient of drag 0.30

Performance

0-60 mph 7.23 seconds

50-70 mph 3.96 seconds

50-70 uphill 6.28 seconds

Fuel economy EPA rated
24/32/27 mpg

city/highway/combined.

Expect 35.6 mpg on the
highway and 30-33 mpg in
rural country driving.

Underhood is the biggest difference, however, in reality, it's a small difference. The standard engine for the HGT is a 2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four banger. Knocking down 161 big horses at 6,200 rpm and 150 pounds of twist at 4,700 rpm, it drives the front wheels via a six speed manual cog swapper or as in my tester a six speed torque converter, auto cog swapper. Go with the auto as performance is virtually identical and its easier to extract.

Also available is a spunkier, 1.6L turbo engine making 201 hp and 195 pounds of twist and it too connects to the front wheels through a seven-speed DCT. Nice. The normally aspirated HGT was the subject of this Road Beat and it is comparable to the Mazda3 which gets a 2.5L 184 hp engine. Zero-60 mph comes up is a quick 7.23 seconds while passing times of 3.96 seconds (50-70 mph) and 6.28 seconds up a 6-7 percent grade. Not many compact type cars compare. The more powerful Mazda3 betters these times marginally, but the difference is insignificant in the 0-60 test and about a half a second in the passing test where the extra power is more noticeable. But in actual driving the HGT feels just as responsive and powerful. If you

are tracking the vehicle, the Mazda3 has the advantage, but otherwise it's a close toss-up. However, the 201 hp turbo engine HGT might just smoke the Mazda3, dropping the performance tests by a second in each category.

Fuel economy for the HGT as per the EPA tests is 24/32/27 mpg city/highway/combined. But my tests continually exceeded those numbers by at least 20 percent. Overall for the 425 miles driven, the HGT averaged an amazing 33.4 mpg with almost no time spent on the freeway (15 percent) and 25 percent spent in moderate traffic. In my round trip to Carson City from Placerville, the HGT averaged 35.6 mpg and at 70 mph on a level highway with the engine spinning 2,000 rpm, the HGT averaged 39.3 mpg. With 14 gallons of fuel on hand that's an easy 500 miles non-stop. See if your tank can last that long? The HGT betters the Mazda by about an MPG, which is insignificant.

Hyundai comes with all the creds for being a sports sedan/wagon, except the rear suspension is a semi-independent torsion beam instead of the HGT Sport (1.6T) fully independent multilink system. For 99.9 percent of buyers, no one will notice. The rest of the creds are all high performance, sports tuned suspension (meaning it's just tightened up a bit), a quick electric power rack (2.6 turns lock to lock) and 17 x 7 inch alloys shod with 225/45 series tires. It adds up to confident, flat grippy handling made easy with good steering feedback.

In the twisties the fun was adding throttle to balance the car mid turn. Very nice. HGT will surprise most people with its powerful agility. While the Mazda3 may be marginally better, it would be hard to discern any difference. Turning circle is a tight 34.8 feet.

Ride quality of the Hyundai is very good, smooth and quiet and very quiet on smooth roads. The cabin is quiet and over heavy bumps, pitch motions are well controlled. It is certainly

equal to the Mazda3.

Safety is everywhere. Four-wheel discs (fronts ventilated) with all the acronyms and with the Style Package (\$1,800) you get blind spot detection. Add the Tech Package (4,300) and fabulous LED headlights. Both those packages include oodles of extras, most of them desirable.

Inside is where the Hyundai also excels. Quality materials are everywhere, including with the above packages, leather, power and heated seats that are superb. Instrumentation is perfect, big tach and speedo flanking the center info/trip computer and a super easy to use center stack.

The hatchback/station wagon design offers versatility and utility with 55 cubes with the rear seat folded and 25 cubes with the seats up.

Now here is where the GT scores, price. The base car which still comes with loads of standard equipment stickers for just \$20,350 plus \$885 for the boat from Ulsan, Korea. My tester had two packages, the Style pack (\$1,800) which adds BSD, push button start, power to the driver's and heat to both front chairs. The Tech pack (\$4,300) adds leather, nav, LED lights, big sunroof and more. Add a \$120 for the embroidered carpeted floor mats. Total damage is \$27,480, a couple of grand less than the Mazda. That makes the Hyundai GT hard to beat, especially considering the standard 10 year/100,000 mile powertrain 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.