

Road Beat: Elantra Eco, a hybrid of a different sort



The 2018 Elantra Eco will impress, especially based on the price. Photo/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Most people will think from the headline that the new 2018 Elantra Eco is a battery hybrid, but it's not. It goes about its business combining a small, 1.4L DOHC 16 valve four-cylinder engine with turbocharging and direct injection. It connects the engine to the front drive wheels via a slick, extremely efficient seven-speed dual clutch automated manual transmission to create one of the most efficient power trains in motordom. While the EPA rates this Hyundai at 32/40/35 mpg city/highway/combined in their prescribed test cycle, real world numbers far exceed those predictions.

With the new Elantra body which continually evolves in a good way (this is a great looking ride with a strong, aggressive grille and front end, smooth, flowing lines culminating in a muscular rear end), this makes for more than the run of the mill econobox, it makes for stylish, fun motoring that is anything but boxy and boring. Eco is a bit exciting.

And while the Eco exterior dimensions are clearly in the middle or slightly smaller than other compact cars (180L x 71W x 57H inches) it has a long 106-inch wheelbase qualifying Eco as a mid-size car under EPA guidelines at 110 cubic feet of interior volume, including a large, well-shaped 14 cubic foot trunk.

More about that diminutive power plant. It packs a bit of a wallop, belting out 128 hp at a low 5,500 rpm and a massive 156 pounds of twist from 1,400 to 3,700 rpm. And that number is important as while the peak hp is nothing spectacular, 156 pounds of twist at 1,400 rpm is. It equates to 42 hp at just off idle. That is huge when it comes to initial acceleration, especially when driving through that slick seven speeder. Zero to 60 mph arrives in a quick 7.70 seconds, making the Eco the second quickest of base compacts only being bested by a 1.5L turbo Honda Civic. The Eco plays with some heady company.



Specifications

Price \$21,560

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 7.70 seconds

50-70 mph 4.01 seconds

50-70 uphill 6.30 seconds

Top speed Well into triple
digits

Fuel economy EPA rated at

32/40/35 mpg
city/highway/combined.
Expect 35-40 mpg in rural
country driving with some
stop and go. 48 plus mpg on
the highway at legal speeds.

Passing performance is also quick with a 50-70 mph simulated pass coming up in 4.01 seconds and the same pass up a steep grade (6-7 percent) only slowing that time to 6.30 seconds. That is satisfying, solid performance that responds without any noticeable turbo lag. You completely forget that the Eco has a turbo motor.

But when you find that your gas gauge doesn't hardly move, you might think that the Eco is a partially battery powered hybrid. Overall, I averaged over 40 mpg with my 200-mile round trip from Placerville to Carson City averaging 44.4 mpg. Highway mileage averaged 48.2 mpg at 70 mph in a two-way highway run. Eco easily outperforms its EPA numbers by 10 percent or more. With its bigger than average 14-gallon fuel tank, just think of the possibilities, a cruising range of nearly 700 miles. Because hybrids have smaller fuel tanks, the Eco will outlast them with the only limiting factor being your own internal tank. Coefficient of drag is excellent at 0.27.

Handling is secure if not a bit sporty. Its credentials are not something to write home about, Tires are 195/65 mounted on 15-inch alloys. While it has MacPherson struts up front it uses a semi-independent torsion beam in the rear and it only has one stab bar up front. But its electric power steering rack is very quick at 2.7 turns lock to lock, is nicely weighted and it has a track of 62 inches front and rear.

Notwithstanding, the Eco still handles quite well with good cornering power. Perhaps its light weight of 2,857 pounds reduces its underpinnings load and requirements. Turning circle is a tight 35 feet. Eco handles nicely.

Eco is also quiet, especially on smooth roads only getting a bit noisy on coarse roads, but its ride is quiet and bumps transmits little if any noise. On the highway there is no wind or engine noise as this little engine that can only spins 2,200 rpm at 70 mph.

While the Eco gets front ventilated discs, the rear brakes are drums. But not to worry ABS and all the other braking acronyms are standard and since the front brakes do 80 percent of the braking rear brakes are not that important. And Eco exhibited strong braking performance. Many other small compacts also use standard drum brakes. Rear cross traffic alert and blind spot detection is also standard as are an array of other safety acronyms. Headlights are good.

Eco's interior features comfortable seats with spacious dimensions. All trim materials are of first rate quality down to its nicely padded instrument panel. Instrumentation is excellent with a large tach and speedo flanking an info center/trip computer. Well done. The center stack is another picture of simplicity and ease of use. The large color screen is touch controlled except for volume and tuning (done with knobs) and the dual HVAC is simple knobs and buttons.

The price of admission makes the Eco a bargain. My tester stickered for \$20,550 with only one "option" the obligatory carpeted floor mats which added \$125. Shipping from its Montgomery, Ala., assembly plant is \$885 bringing the total to \$21,560. Eco is one of the highest value cars in production and its fun to drive, uses gas like its being siphoned through spaghetti and goes like stink. I would drive one every day.

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.