

Santa Fe reflects Hyundai's pursuit of luxury

by Mark_Maynard

There has been a trickle-up effect at Hyundai as it takes aim at building luxury-class vehicles.

This engineering is easily seen and felt in the company's new and largest SUV, the Veracruz. But Hyundai's pursuit of luxury is also felt in its smaller SUV, the Santa Fe, today's test vehicle.

SANTA FE - The 2007 Hyundai Santa Fe makes an ideal alternative to a sedan, with roomy cargo space and an option to add a pair of third-row seats. CNS Photo courtesy of Hyundai. It is not as richly appointed as the Veracruz, but the solid engineering is noted in the Santa Fe's ride quality that is separated from road harshness and engine noise. What is under the skin gives an impression of superior quality. And that refinement is also applied to what users see and touch.

Santa Fe is new for 2007 and a bit less than 3 inches wider and a little more than 3 inches longer. It makes an ideal alternative to a sedan, with roomy cargo space and an option to add a pair of third-row seats.

Front headroom is generous at 40.2 inches, and there's a commanding view over the hood. Rear-seat legroom is generous at 38.6 inches, the seat backs recline and the center seat position is decent with adequate foot room provided by the low exhaust/transmission tunnel.

Interior design isn't gimmicky. All switches and controls have ergonomic placement and are easily understood without continual references to the owner's manual.

And its Santa Fe is covered with the Hyundai warranty of five years/60,000 miles for basic coverage with roadside assistance. And 10 years/100,000 miles for the powertrain.

A basic front-wheel drive, manual transmission Santa Fe with a 185-horsepower, 2.7-liter V-6 has a starting price of \$21,715. Add \$1,200 for a four-speed Shiftronic automatic transmission and the fuel economy goes up 1 mpg from the manual in city and highway driving to 21/26 mpg.

As a basic, grocery-getting, kid-hauling or kid-driving transportation, the Santa Fe GLS is well-endowed with standard safety features including electronic stability control, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, traction control and six air bags, including side curtain bags.

Other standard equipment includes remote locking, air conditioning, tilt-telescopic steering wheel, rear privacy glass, six-speaker CD-audio system, power (heated) outside mirrors and windows, and 16-inch alloy wheels.

For another \$1,500, the midrange SE is more of a keeper and adds a five-speed Shiftronic automatic transmission and a 242-hp, 3.3-liter V-6. Also included are extras such as 18-inch wheels, an auto-dimming inside mirror with compass readout, fog lights and automatic headlights, steering-wheel audio controls and a cargo net.

The top-line Limited with all-wheel drive - \$28,045 - is the choice for those buyers who could afford to buy a larger vehicle but prefer driving richly in a smaller package. There is a little more chrome on the outside, the leather is attractive and the front seats are heated with power lumbar for the driver.

As equipped, the Limited seems almost too well-appointed to allow unruly children to scuff up or to toss bags of potting soil into the cargo area.

About the only option Hyundai doesn't offer is a navigation system.

Unlike some luxury-brand SUVs, buying the Santa Fe can be justified as a lifestyle need - but it's classy enough to satisfy a want.

Copley News Service

SPECS

2007 Hyundai Santa Fe Limited AWD

Body style: compact, five-passenger SUV, two- or all-wheel drive

Engine: 242-horsepower, 3.3-liter V-6

Transmission: five-speed Shiftronic automatic

EPA estimated fuel mileage: 19 mpg city, 24 highway; 87 octane recommended

PRICING

MSRP: \$28,715; price as tested, \$28,810

Options on test car: carpeted floor mats, \$95

Warranty: Five years/60,000 miles basic coverage with roadside assistance; 10 years/100,000 miles powertrain; 7 years/unlimited miles for rust protection.

Where assembled: Montgomery, Ala.

Competition: Honda CR-V, Mitsubishi Outlander, Saturn Vue, Subaru Forester and Toyota RAV4.

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