# Road beat: Tucson Sport, new best in class?




Hyundai is giving Mazda competition with its Tucson. Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Hyundai is on a roll, now making not just good cars, but world-class vehicles that can achieve best in class status as this new Tucson Sport demonstrates in the compact SUV class.



**Specifications Price** $27,170 Engine Turbo-direct injected DOHC, 16 valve, 1.6L inline four 175 hp @ 5,500 rpm 195 lb-ft of torque @ 1,500-4,500 rpm **Transmission** Seven Speed Dual Clutch automated manual Configuration Transverse front engine/FWD/AWD Dimensions Wheelbase 105.1 inches Length 176.2 inches Width 72.8 inches Height 64.8 inches Track (f/r) 63.3/63.8 inches Ground clearance 6.4 inches Fuel capacity 16.4 gallons Weight 3,369-3,580 Steering lock to lock 2.71 turns Turning circle 34.9 feet Wheels 19X7.5 inch alloys Tires 245/45X19 Cargo capacity (rear seats/up/down) 31.0/61.9 cubic feet Tow capacity 1,500 pounds (with trailer brakes) Co-efficient of drag 0.33 P**erformance** 0-60 mph 6.97 seconds 50-70 mph 3.84 seconds 50-70

uphill 5.43 seconds Top speed Plenty fast (well into triple digits) Fuel economy EPA rated 25/30/27 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 29 mpg in rural country, suburban driving. 34-35 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

Stealing a bit of styling from its bigger brother, the Santa Fe, the new Tucson has a sleeker shape with edgy, defined character lines, a swept back window line, what's becoming a Hyundai characteristic, an aggressive snout grille which makes a powerful statement and creates an excellent brand identity. If you study the grille's design, you can see how other parts of the front end are tied in like the headlights, the lower fog and parking lights all working together to create a complex focal point that says muscle and athleticism. Tucson has a slick co-efficient of drag of a low 0.33.

Being a compact SUV, the Tucson is only 176-inches long. But it is wide at 73 inches, which allows for a super wide track of 63.5 inches. That will pay dividends later. Height is deceiving at 65 inches, it looks lower. Ground clearance is good at 6.4 inches. Inside, Tucson is voluminous relative to its diminutive exterior, having a total volume of 133 cubic feet (large cars need to have 120 cubes in the cabin and trunk to meet that EPA class) and 62 cubic feet of cargo capacity with the second row 60/40 split seating folded flat. Upright, the cargo area still holds over 30 cubes.

What motivates the Tucson is a big part of the reason why Tucson is such a tremendous vehicle. It is powered by a diminutive 1.6L DOHC, 16 valve turbo inline four, first used in the Sonata Eco, but as in the Sonata Eco, don't get the idea it is a performance slouch. As in the Sonata, this engine

is a runner and a quick one at that. With a 175 ponies at a low 5,500 rpm and 195 pounds of twist between 1,500 to 4,500 rpm plus its super trick seven speed dual clutch automatic, the Tucson can scoot from Tucson to Phoenix in a nano second.

How quick you ask? How about 0-60 mph in 6.97 seconds. Want more? Passing performance is stellar with a 50-70 mph simulated pass stopping the Chrondek in 3.84 seconds. Up a steep grade it only slows the Tucson a second and a half to 5.43 seconds. That's a heady bunch of steam from just a 175 hp and a curb weight of 3,500 pounds. But there is a reason for that flat torque curve and the efficient tranny. As you figured by now, this Tucson feels more like 225 hp with an incredibly responsive mid-range. What's wrong, then? There is a bit of turbo lag, but once on the boost (which takes a couple of tenths) you start thinking about interstellar transportation. It rocks.

Now for the best news, fuel economy. You would think with that high of a performing SUV you would need to buy stock in an oil company. Not quite. EPA rates the Tucson at 25/30/27 mpg city/highway/combined, but during my testing the overall mpg was 29 mpg and at 70 mph on a level highway it returned 35 mpg. In a 175-mile roundtrip run from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe, the Tucson averaged 35.4 mpg. Interestingly, the Tucson Eco with identical specs to the Sport except for tires is EPA rated 1-3 mpg more than the Sport, so maybe it is in the EPA testing procedures as their mileage should be almost the same. My test proves that point. This is an absolutely "no-guilt" SUV that runs like a gazelle and eats like a cat.



The vehicle handles well in a variety of conditions.

As a handler, you never expect much from an SUV. Mazda with its CX-5 showed it could be done and while I can't tell you which is the better handler unless driven back to back on a track, this new Tucson feels like it would give the CX-5 a serious run for the money. It is that good, maybe even better.  Suspension is state of the art all wheel independent, MacPherson struts up front and a dual control trailing link are in the rear with Sachs dampers in all four corners. Even the bushings have been optimized. Drive Mode allows the driver to select and control some of the dynamics, like steering, tranny and throttle mapping. Steering is very quick at 2.71 turns lock to lock. Then there are the wheels and tires, standard 19X7.5 in alloys shod with serious 245/45X19 rubber. While I have seen better looking wheels, this entire package goes around corners like water in a hose, flat with excellent feedback.

But while the Tucson shows it can dance with the best, maybe better, its ride is superb. You can barely hear the engine on the outside of the Tucson, on the inside the engine at idle is inaudible. You can actually feel the quiet, the sublime, controlled smoothness with not an ounce of float. It's firm but anything but harsh. Tucson is one of the best riding SUVs considering its handling quality. The engine spins 2,200 at 70 mph and is silent as in wind and road noise.

Brakes are four wheel discs (front ventilated) with all the

acronyms and arrested forward progress from 40 mph in 43 feet with a firm, linear pedal. Tucson also has all the electronic wizardry and airbags you would expect to find in any other automakers product. Headlights are excellent in depth and breath. Also standard on this Sport model are a color backup camera, blind spot detection and lane change assist.

Inside is a well done interior in comfort and design. Seats are done in a subtle dark cloth that will undoubtedly look as good on the first day and the day 100,000 rolls past on the odometer. Even better is how they coddle your back side beautifully. Soft touch material is in most places and the whole package has a luxurious feel without being obvious. The instrument binnacle contains a large speedo and tach flanking an information center which is easy to use as is every device in the Tucson, including the media center and HVAC system in the center stack. Well done Tucson. While the interior is stylish, it is practical and easy to use. Rear seating is roomy for three.

Pricing is shocking, but in a reverse way. My loaded tester, a Tucson Sport, stickered for $26,150. The only add-ons were optional carpeted floor mats, $125, and the mandatory boat ride from Ulsan, Korea, of $895. Everything else was standard, heated power mirrors, pushbutton start, power remote lift gate and even the illuminated exterior door handles. AWD will add $1,400. Even though it has a center color center screen, a GPS is an option. There is no question that the Tucson has everything, including a 10-year/100,000 mile warranty, but a high price. The Tucson is one of the best deals on the market, even if you are looking for a sedan. It’s that good.

*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.*