

Road Beat: 2018 Hyundai Sonata Eco best midsize



The 2018 Hyundai Sonata Eco is the best Sonata yet.
Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It's been three years and at least 150 cars since I last visited with the Hyundai Sonata Eco. I loved it then and now consider the newest 2018 Sonata Eco to be perhaps the best midsize car in the business. That doesn't mean it's the quickest, best handling or best looking, but the best value, excelling in those aforementioned parameters while being the best at price point, fuel economy and operating efficiency. So, when you consider the whole package, Eco becomes excellence.

Sonata design broke new ground in the 2011 model year with the

sixth generation and reaching a sales peak by 2012. It was a winner. While the seventh generation appeared in 2015, this 2018 model gets quite a refresh. Interestingly, while the new generation is a better-looking car with improved content, sales have fallen a bit. It might be due to renewed interest in CUV/SUVs, but this new Sonata Eco is the best Sonata yet and the best midsize car value in the business.

First, although Sonata Eco sports mid-size dimensions (191L x 73W x 58H inches) on a 110-inch wheelbase, Sonata Eco is by EPA classification a large car with more than 120 cubic feet of interior volume. Second, the Eco is powered by a little giant, 1.6L inline four banger with DOHC, 16 valves, dual continuously variable valve timing, direct injection and a small turbo charger that cranks out a solid 178 hp at a low 5,500 rpm and oodles of twist with a peak of 195 pounds which occurs at a low of 1,500 rpm and stays flat at that prodigious number until 4,500 rpm meaning peak combustion efficiency is available from off idle to a very high rpm. Sure, other midsize four banger sedans make as much or slightly more hp, but very few produce that kind of twist especially over that rpm range. The secret is the direct injection and turbo charging.

But there is more as the front wheels are driven via a seven-speed dual clutch auto cog swapper, perhaps the most efficient tranny in the business. That adds up to overachieving performance with a 0-60 mph time of just 6.77 seconds which makes the Sonata Eco a high-performance automobile. Passing times also reflect this performance prowess with a 50-70 mph level pass of 3.67 seconds and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slowing that time by about a second to 4.79 seconds. This Eco is not just extremely responsive, but it really scoots. And as to turbo lag, what turbo lag? My advice is don't choose one off at a traffic light grand prix. There are only a few midsize family sedans that have this kind of scoot.

Fuel economy is excellent with EPA numbers showing 28/37/31 mpg city/highway/combined. But expect about 10 percent better as in a 20-mile two-way highway run at 70 mph the Eco averaged 43 mpg. Overall in 516 miles including all testing the Eco averaged 34.1 mpg and in its over the mountain 200-mile round trip to Carson City the Eco averaged 37 mpg in aggressive driving. It's hard to stay out of the delicious throttle. Only hybrids return better fuel economy and not by much. No other midsize car can match this balance of performance and fuel economy. Engine speed is a low 2,050 rpm at 70 mph which contributes to the Eco's extreme quiet and silky behavior. One other bonus is the huge 18.5-gallon fuel tank. After a fill up on the highway your range on the trip computer will be over 600 miles. You might be able to stretch that out to 700 miles if your human components can last that long.



Specifications

Price with destination
\$23,660 to \$28,310 loaded up

Engine

Four cylinder inline 1.6L
turbo 16 valve 178 hp @
5,500 rpm
195 lb.-ft. of torque at
1,500-4,500 rpm

Transmission

Seven speed Dual Clutch
automatic with a manual mode

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine, front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 110.4 inches

Length 191.1 inches

Width 73.4 inches

Height 58.1 inches

Track (f/r) 63.5/63.5 inches

Ground clearance 5.3 inches

Cabin volume 106.1 cubic feet

Trunk volume 16.3 cubic feet

Fuel Capacity 18.5 gallons

Weight 3,247 pounds

Steering lock to lock 2.78 turns

Turning circle 35.8 feet

Wheels 16X6.5-inch alloys

Tires 205/65X16

Co-efficient of drag 0.27

Performance

0-60 mph 6.77 seconds

50-70 mph 3.67 seconds

50-70 uphill 4.79 seconds

Top speed beyond sanity

Fuel economy EPA rated at 28/37/31

city/highway/combined.

Expect 33-34 mpg in suburban driving and 43 plus mpg on a level highway at 70 mph.

Handling is also good as the Eco gets state of the art independent suspension with coils in all four corners and gas shocks. Track is a very wide 64 inches and the steering is a quick electric power rack at just 2.78 turns lock to lock.

About the only negative is the still big 16 x 6.5-inch alloys and 205/65 series rubber. But notwithstanding, the handling is very good with good cornering power and nimble feet. The suspension is a bit soft so body roll is more than I prefer, but I am picky and prefer a very sporty stiff, firm ride. However, Eco can attack corners with some of the best and exits are fun as you squeeze the throttle. It's fun to drive.

Ride quality is very smooth, quiet and bump absorbing. You won't get complaints from granny. There is no wind, road and engine noise.

My tester was devoid of any option packages but basic safety is there including a fabulous back-up camera, blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert and all of the usual acronyms. Strong four-wheel disc brakes (front ventilated) have powerful stopping power and the headlights on low and high-beam are very good.

Not to out do itself is the quality interior with soft touch materials, comfortable soft seats and a precise instrument panel. Besides the customary speedo and tach flanking and info center, mention should be made of the easy to use, excellent trip computer which is overflowing with pertinent info. Nice job. The center stack is easy to use with appropriate knobs, pushbuttons and a touch screen.

Rear seating is voluminous and so is the well-shaped trunk.

Pricing is the other part of the balance equation with a Monroney of \$22,650 plus \$885 for the train and truck from its Montgomery, Alabama assembly plant. My only option is the \$125 for the obligatory carpeted floor mats. That's it, \$23,660 all in for the best value and perhaps the best mid-size car on the market. I would buy one. Oh, and I forgot to mention to 10 year/100,000-mile 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.