

First Test: 2010 Hyundai Tucson



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Comparing the the all-new 2010 Hyundai Tucson to the previous rendition is quite a shock to the system. First, there's the exterior. Its European-designed sheetmetal boasts flowing natural lines from Hyundai's recent "fluidic sculpture" mantra, meaning there's more than a bit of flair infused in this functional Korean crossover. Secondly, it's more fuel efficient than its demode predecessor, offering more bang for the buck. And lastly, after we spent a few days behind the wheel, it proved itself to be a thoroughly evolved player that's primed and ready to shake up the fierce crossover class populated by the Honda CR-V, Chevrolet Equinox, and Toyota RAV4.

Yes, that is a rather dramatic assertion. But take a glance at the model compared to last year's, and you'll get a good understanding of just how much Hyundai wants to fit in with the segment's fashionable boys and girls. Its lines sweep back considerably from the short, rounded nose, giving the vehicle's outline an impression of sleekness and sportiness. Long gone is the rugged crossover look the brand previously possessed. Say hello to the era of the dapper, softer-roading urban dweller.

It pulls off the Euro-chic look pretty well, we have to say, though we would have preferred lower body-colored bits and a bigger wheel and tire package to better fill out the generous wells. (Our Diamond Silver GLS tester came standard with optional 17-in. alloys wrapped in Kumho Solus KL21s.) Then again, potential buyers can step up to the Limited trim level for standard 18-inchers to take care of the latter.

Ride quality was on the stiffer side for a compact CUV. It was, however, never jarring to the point of severe annoyance or kidney pain. Some bumps and potholes communicated rather harshly during our stay together, but nothing too bad. Bigger front stabilizer bars likely were the culprits for the mildly firm ride. These gripes noted, we ventured into more curvaceous environments and appreciated the Tucson's spry demeanor. Its electronically controlled steering felt more assured than on our First Drive impression (a subsequent calibration might have made this so), with turn-in well prescribed and manageable.



The Theta II 2.4L four-cylinder diverted all 176 hp/168 lb-ft to the front wheels with surprising haste during our demanding driving. We recorded a naught-to-60-mph sprint in 8.2 sec, more than a second quicker than the CR-V AWD (9.5 sec). The Hyundai also achieved our figure eight at 28.6 sec at a 0.57 g average (versus the Honda's 17.2 sec@ 79 mph) and hit the skidpad with a 0.77 g average (0.76 g). We're thinking the CUV's relatively light 3203-lb curb weight helped out its performance causes.

New for the model year is an Eco Button indicating when economical driving behavior is achieved. We tried to adhere to the Eco mode as much as possible, but found that it sometimes put us at speeds slower than the posted limit. Nevertheless, we achieved the claimed 31 highway mpg (23 mpg city) on our SoCal freeway runs. If you're wondering, it bests the EPA ratings of the Honda (21/28), Chevrolet (22/32), and Toyota (22/28) models.



Full torque is had at just 4,000 rpm, meaning more than a few torque-steer-filled jumps from stoplights were the norm at first. Once we adjusted to the touchy tall pedal, the engine's smoothness continued to impress. During highway speed lane changes, torque was often difficult to muster while high in the six-speed auto's range. A handy slot of the gearshift into manual Shiftronic mode for a downshift quickly remedied the power searching. During said lane changes, we were consistently forced to double-check our blind spots. Thanks to the new thicker D-pillars, rearward visibility has been diminished; our mirrors were mostly filled with a nice view of the Tucson's prominent back haunches.



Designers continued the "fluidic sculpture" throughout the passenger space. Catching our eye was the distinct instrument cluster set behind the leather-wrapped multi-function steering wheel. The unit features blue-lit gauges recessed within twin pod-like structures. Central dash controls were as easy to use (and find) as they come. Standard features like iPod hookup boded well with our passengers looking for a complete plug-and-play music solution. Though our GLS didn't feature the optional navigation system with backup camera, the whole was put together cleanly without any chaotic lines, extra hard plastics, or mysterious shapes. There's also plenty of storage and cupholders -- we counted 19 total --

for thirsty pack rats. Road noise was still higher than we would have expected for a redesigned model.

The 60/40 folding rear seats are clad in leatherette. Our 6-ft-plus friends had no problem fitting inside with ample room, thanks to the model's extra 3.3 in. in length and 1 in. in width over the outgoing model. Cargo room was never a problem during our last-minute holiday shopping. Granted, its volume with passengers in tow (25.7 cu ft) is smaller than that of the Honda CR-V (35.7 cu ft) or Chevy Equinox (31.4 cu ft) and could pose a foreseeable problem when transporting containers bigger than our small-to-medium sized gifts. However, the Tucson is shorter than the Honda by 6.1 in. and the Chevrolet by a whopping 14.6 in., so the days of averting mall parking spaces labeled "Compact" are over.

So is the 2010 Tucson what Hyundai needs to grow its meager 2-percent CUV market share in America? Considering all the factors, the simple answer is "Yes." We can't wait to put the new Tucson up against some of its hottest new adversaries, so stay glued to *MT Online* for the full report.

2010 Hyundai Tucson GLS FWD	
Base price range	\$19,995
Price as tested	\$22,590
Vehicle layout	Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door, SUV
Engine	2.4L/176-hp/168-lb-ft DOHC 16-valve 4-cyl
Transmission	6-speed automatic
Curb weight (mfr)	3203 lb
Wheelbase	103.9 in
Length x width x height	173.2 x 71.7 x 66.3 in
0-60 mph	8.2 sec
Quarter mile	16.3 sec @ 83.9 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	122 ft
Lateral acceleration	0.77 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	28.6 sec @ 0.57 g (avg)
EPA city/hwy fuel econ	23/31 mpg (est)
CO2 emissions	0.75 lb/mile