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2010 Hyundai Tucson Picture

*A Korean car designed in Germany with an American name. Very cosmopolitan. /
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Road Test

2010 Hyundai Tucson First Drive

A Korean Car Designed in Germany With an American Name. Now That's Cosmopolitan

According to the unerring wisdom of the Web, the name "Tucson" originated from the Pima Indians. Apparently it comes from the word "schookson," which means the spring at the foot of a black mountain. We have to wonder what word they'd have used for the compact CUV at the end of the driveway.

We'll probably never know, but the CUV at the end of Hyundai's driveway is the all-new 2010 Hyundai Tucson, flaunting chiseled planes and crisp edges aplenty, courtesy of its tailors in Frankfurt. The new look is called fluidic sculpture, according to Hyundai's president John Krafcik, and it seems as good a label as any.



One thing's for sure. It's a big, flamboyant step away from the humble look of the outgoing model, which (with the possible exception of its hexagonal rear window) did not deviate much from the two-box orthodoxy of the day. This new Tucson rolls out with a bumper-free grin at the front, a sculpted and creased profile, and a cheeky rear end with raked rear glass.

It's a pretty cosmopolitan effort, and it gives the [Acura RDX](#) and [Honda CR-V](#) some serious competition.

Everything's Bigger in America

The shape of the 2010 Hyundai Tucson neatly conceals the fact that this compact SUV has grown 3.3 inches in length and 1 inch wider, yet is claimed to weigh 61 pounds less than its predecessor. In the process, its interior dimensions have expanded the passenger cell to an extent that Hyundai staff happily claim is larger than that of a [BMW X3](#), despite the fact that the Tucson has a smaller footprint. It is, they claim, also 38 percent more structurally rigid than a [Nissan Rogue](#).

Well, we can't verify that, can we? What we can attest to is that the Tucson certainly exhibits symptoms of a very rigid body shell, able to smother surface ripples without the slightest secondary vibration detected through the structure or the doors. That's a pretty good achievement, given the large aperture in the roof necessary for the new, full-length panoramic sunroof.

Going Down the Road

The chassis holds its end up, too, with MacPherson struts in front and multilink rear armatures offering a surprisingly good compromise between ride comfort and body-motion control. Although spring rates are up in the new 2010 Hyundai Tucson, the ride is sufficiently compliant on surface breaks that the vehicle does not hop off line, yet it's damped well enough to suppress unnecessary bobbing and rolling motions.

Hyundai is currently brewing up a high-power variant that will rival the Acura RDX and Mazda CX-7.

Part of that is the new 1-inch hollow antiroll bar in front, which represents a 19 percent increase over its forebear, and the 18mm rear stabilizer, which is 29 percent larger than before, and this adds up to a lot more body control than before aside from the basic tuning of the vehicle's handling balance. But the best part is the way in which all these components have been tuned by Hyundai's U.S. chassis engineers for what we laughingly refer to as local roads.

Propulsion

Propelling this artful collection of bits down the road is Hyundai's Theta II 2.4-liter inline-4, which cranks out 176 horsepower at 6,000 rpm, and 168 pound-feet of torque at 4,000 rpm. While it isn't exactly overpowered when unraveling the sinuous canyons of Malibu, where we were introduced to the Tucson by Hyundai, the twin-cam four feels entirely adequate on normal roads, and its exertions are never thrashy or intrusive in nature.

The transmission options are a six-speed manual and a six-speed automatic (with manual override) that was designed and developed in-house by Hyundai itself. Well, once you've built locomotives and ships, what's a gearbox here or there? We did not get to try out the one manual vehicle on Hyundai's introductory drive, but we can confirm that the compact new autobox performed seamlessly throughout, and we failed to mystify or discombobulate it in any way.



There will be no V6 option for this generation of Tucson, but there may be a version of the turbocharged, direct-injection 2.0-liter inline-4 that we've seen in the [Genesis Coupe](#) that Hyundai is currently brewing up, so the company will likely offer a high-power Tucson variant at some stage that will rival the Acura RDX and [Mazda CX-7](#). In the meantime, this powertrain with its 2.4-liter four will do just fine for the needs of the Tucson's likely customers. We never felt impatient at any point, and the vehicle's overall balance probably makes up for any perceived deficit in the 0-60-mph department.

Bending This Way and That

While the 2010 Hyundai Tucson boasts a tighter turning circle than some of its rivals (34.7 feet compared with a Honda CR-V's 37.4), it employs an electric power-assist system that may be the new CUV's most controversial aspect. Because electric systems provide no boost in the straight-ahead position, the transition off-center is tricky to calibrate.

As with similar systems on Toyotas and other makes, the Tucson's wheel comes off-center with a slightly artificial feel. It also offers fairly persistent self-centering torque while turning that has an almost magnetic sense to it. None of this is of real concern to owners, who will doubtless get used to it and then forget all about it. Besides, feel at the wheel actually improves when you're hustling the little wagon through carsick canyon as fast as its four cylinders can pedal.

A bit of an irony there. The electric PS helps the car achieve 31 mpg on the highway, but feels better when you're caning it at 15-mpg speeds. Such is life in the Tucson, and protecting that life is Hyundai's usual array of safety gizmos, including electronic stability control with a rollover sensor that keeps the curtain airbags inflated when you turn turtle; traction control; ABS and six airbags. In addition to these, the Tucson now offers hill-start assist and downhill brake control, just like the big SUV players do.

Standard front-wheel-drive and all-wheel-drive versions are offered, and the new Tucson's AWD unit is electronically controlled to engage the rear wheels once front-wheel slippage is detected. A switch locks the axles together at a 50 percent front/50 percent rear torque split when desired. In normal use, we couldn't detect any substantial difference in control feel between the front- and all-wheel-drive models.

The Malibu Factor

And, of course, we didn't try any of the 2010 Hyundai Tucson's extreme terrain equipment in the wilds of Malibu, but we feel reasonably sure they'll all work as advertised for that minuscule portion of the public that actually needs this stuff.



What we are sure of is how well the Tucson fits into its intended suburban role. With an eye-catching new interior design, comfortable seats, climate control and opulent available equipment levels (including navigation, a back-up camera and a premium 360-watt stereo with iPod/USB inputs, Bluetooth phone connectivity and all the rest), the new Tucson has good urban street cred. Hyundai is keeping model variations to a minimum. With GLS and Limited levels, two transmissions and few options, ordering a new Tucson will be a simple process.

Although the 2010 Hyundai Tucson wears a Pima name also used for that town in Arizona, the vehicle we see here was initially intended as a European model. Hence the design input by the Frankfurt studio. Clearly, the U.S. and Europe are moving closer in terms of design language, and we'd argue that the new Hyundai looks as good over here as anywhere.

We'd also bet that American consumers get the better deal. Starting at \$19,790, including \$795 for destination, the Tucson undercuts its serious stateside rivals as well as those infamously steep Euro stickers. With an interior that compares favorably with Honda's CR-V and puts the [Toyota RAV4](#) to shame, and with curb appeal to spare, the 2010 Hyundai Tucson could do a lot better than the 2 percent of segment share it is currently enjoying.

Edmunds attended a manufacturer-sponsored event, to which selected members of the press were invited, to facilitate this report.