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Test Drive: Pocket rocket Genesis Coupe breaks new ground for Hyundai



There's a new sports coupe on the block, Hyundai's 2010 Genesis Coupe, ready to take on the re-born Pony cars like the Ford Mustang, Chevrolet Camaro and Dodge Challenger. It is available with a turbocharged 2.0-litre inline four-cylinder or a 3.8-litre V6, producing 306 hp.

Lorne Drury photo

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By Lorne Drury

Wow, how times have changed in the automotive world!

Who would have thought we would be talking about a sports coupe from Hyundai in the same breath as an Infiniti, a BMW or even a Mazda RX-8.

But that's the case with Hyundai's new pocket rocket, the 2010 Genesis Coupe that was benchmarked against the Infiniti G37 and BMW 335i- two of the heaviest hitters on the market.

While Hyundai says its primary competitors are the Nissan Altima Coupe, Ford Mustang, Honda Accord Coupe, Chevrolet Camaro, Dodge Challenger, Mitsubishi Eclipse, Honda Civic Si and Chevrolet Cobalt, Hyundai talks about the Genesis Coupe in the same breath as the Infiniti and BMW.

The rear-wheel drive coupe is available with a turbocharged 2.0-litre DOHC four-cylinder engine making 210 hp and 223 lb/ft of torque or a 3.8-litre V6 with 306 hp and 266 lb/ft of torque.

Make no mistake, this is a driver's car, aimed squarely at males who want an exciting driving experience at an affordable price. Hyundai's marketing types suggest the less-expensive four-cylinder model will appeal more to the 20-something crowd, while the V6 will be snapped up by a more mature crowd, even those in their mid-50s.

What Hyundai believes sets the Genesis Coupe apart from the competition is its rear-wheel drive configuration, 300-plus horsepower, independent rear suspension, light weight (under 3,400 lb) and mid-\$20s starting price.

This is a small segment of the market, making up only two or three per cent of the total vehicle sales in Canada, but for Hyundai having a contender in the class helps change the image of what was once just considered a bargain-basement brand.

Today, Hyundai is the fifth largest automaker in the world and with cars like the Genesis Coupe and Sedan, it is starting to be noticed by buyers looking for something more than just a low-priced vehicle.

The Genesis Coupe starts at an affordable \$24,995 for the 2.0-litre inline four-cylinder turbo with six-speed manual transmission and 18-inch alloy wheels.

My tester was the 3.8-litre V6 with six-speed ZF automatic transmission, featuring paddle shifters for manual shift mode. This was the GT model with 19-inch aluminum alloy wheels, a Brembo braking package with red four-piston calipers and a sport-tuned suspension. It priced out at \$36,295, still great value for the dollar.

While the names are similar, the Genesis Coupe is far removed from the sedan, an entry luxury model that doesn't have the sporty appearance or performance of this new addition to the Hyundai lineup.

With its great looks, the Genesis Coupe is bound to attract attention in the showroom. But this is not just a slick looking sports coupe; it has performance to match the looks.

The wide stance, expansive hood, short overhangs and sloping roof make it the best looking model in the Hyundai stable in my opinion. The V6 version has standard projector beam headlamps and front fog lamps, while the outside mirrors have LED signal lighting.

Inside, the cabin is simply, yet nicely finished in cockpit-like style. Controls are easy to reach and gauges can be read at a glance.

While there is an abundance of hard plastics, the contrasting finishes make for an attractive look. Front-seat legroom is good, even for six-footers like myself, however the back seat is a different story. Space is extremely tight, both in leg and headroom due to the sloping roofline, so this is

essentially a two-seater with a back seat for emergencies. The back seats also fold down to add to the cargo space, although the trunk opening is a tad small.

The front bucket seats are comfortable and well bolstered. They are heated in all but the base model.

Despite the low starting price, safety isn't compromised. The Genesis Coupe comes standard with six airbags, anti-lock brakes with brake assist and stability control.

Also standard are active front headrests, which help prevent whiplash and neck injury by moving forward in the event of a crash.

The base 2.0T comes with steering wheel-mounted Bluetooth, audio and cruise controls; 18-inch alloy wheels; six airbags; Electronic Stability Control (ESC) with traction control; an antilock brake system (ABS) with electronic brake-force distribution (EBD); fog lights; metal grain interior trim; USB and auxiliary audio outlets; automatic light control; a trip computer; a leather wrapped steering wheel and gear shift knob; power and heated exterior mirrors and an AM/FM/XM/CD/MP3 stereo system with six speakers.

The Genesis Coupe 3.8 features an advanced all-aluminum naturally aspirated V6 engine and a standard Torsen-type limited slip differential.

A six-speed ZF-sourced automatic with paddle shift manual sports mode is optional. Automatic temperature control, power driver's seat, power sunroof, premium door scuff plates, proximity key and chrome lower fascia accents are among the additional features over the Premium 2.0 GT package, which has aluminum foot pedals, 19-inch alloys, Brembo braking system, sport tuned suspension and leather seats. The same GT package is offered in the 3.8 model, while a navigation system package is available.

On the road, the 3.8 has plenty of giddy-up. One U.S. automotive magazine lists a 0-60 mph time of 5.5 seconds for the V6 with the 2.0T putting in a time of 6.8 seconds. I haven't driven the 2.0T, but the V6 has power to spare on acceleration and in passing situations.

Handling and steering are top notch and the car negotiates the twisties with ease. Beware of potholes and uneven pavement, though. The sport suspension is just right for high-performance driving, not comfort. You feel every bump and indentation in the road, something not unusual in a true sports coupe.

Hyundai has come a long way in a short period of time and the 2010 Genesis Coupe is a perfect example of what makes them successful. They set the bar high and attempt to match the best vehicles in class at a lower price.

Value for the dollar is what it's all about the Genesis Coupe has it in spades.

HYUNDAI GENESIS COUPE 2010 AT A GLANCE

BODY STYLE: two-door sports coupe

DRIVE METHOD: front engine, rear-wheel drive.

ENGINE: 2.0-litre DOHC, turbocharged inline four cylinder (210 hp, 223 lb/ft); 3.8-litre DOHC V6 (300 hp, 266 lb/ft).

FUEL ECONOMY: 2.0T manual 10.1L/100 km (28 mpg) city, 6.6L/100 km (43 mpg) highway; 2.0T automatic 10.4L/100 km (27 mpg) city; 6.6L/100 km (43 mpg) highway; 3.8 manual 12.0L/100 km (24 mpg) city, 7.6L/100 km (37 mpg) highway; 3.8 automatic 11.9L/100 km (24 mpg) city, 7.3L/100 km (39 mpg) highway.

PRICE: 2.0T, \$24,995; 2.0T Premium \$27,495; 2.0T GT, \$30,445; 3.8, \$32,995, GT, \$34,995.