

2010 Hyundai Elantra Touring

Spacious, zippy 5-door hatchback hits the mark

Gary Witzenburg / autoMedia.com

Who knew that when Hyundai brought out its all-new Elantra compact sedan to the U.S. market for 2007, it was planning to follow two years later with a sporty wagon version? Well, they call it a “5-door,” but it is a wagon—which is okay since relatively small, functional wagons, as alternatives to compact utilities, are beginning to be cool again. Witness German luxomakers [BMW](#) and Audi, who both offer premo-priced wagons of this size. Who knew, when Hyundai unveiled this Elantra Touring five-door hatchback (wagon) at the February, 2008 Chicago Auto Show, that it would turn out to be as likeable to drive as it is sportingly handsome to look at? Not to mention unusually roomy and practical for its size.

Two Levels



We recently spent several days of quality time in a sport-oriented SE model and came away suitably impressed. Largely due to its long 106.3-inch wheelbase, the Elantra Touring boasts a “class-leading” 125.5 cu. ft. of interior volume, meaning more space inside than popular-priced Japanese ([Toyota](#) Corolla, Honda Civic) and domestic (Chevy Cobalt, Ford Focus) competitors. Four well-fed six-foot males can sit comfortably inside with ample legroom front and rear, plus room for a fifth (preferably smaller) companion in the middle in back. It also offers best-in-class cargo volume, with 24.3 cu. ft. behind the 60/40 split rear seats and a spacious 65.3 cu. ft. with them folded flat. That number beats Toyota’s Corolla-based Matrix CUV and falls 7.6 cu. ft. short of the larger and more expensive Honda CR-V. And the retracting cargo cover in back can be removed and stored under the floor.

The 2009 Elantra Touring was introduced in just one well equipped trim level. For 2010, a lower-priced, paired-down GLS version joins the line, while the sportier uplevel model becomes SE. Electronic stability control (ESC) and iPod/USB/auxiliary jacks are standard, as are a 172-watt AM/FM/XM/CD/MP3 six-speaker audio system, power locks, windows, heated mirrors, cruise control (with automatic [transmission](#)) and remote keyless entry with alarm. A popular equipment package adds roof rails, a tilt/telescopic steering wheel with audio controls, fog lights, retractable cargo cover, trip computer, eight-way driver’s seat, premium cloth interior and more.

Features and Comfort



The SE gets all of that plus a power sunroof, heated front seats, leather steering wheel and shift knob, a B&M Racing sport shifter and low-profile [tires](#) on 17-inch alloy wheels. Besides roomy, comfortable and relatively quiet, the SE's cabin is surprisingly upscale in terms of fits, materials and feature content. The serious looking instruments, illuminated in cool blue LCD at night, and two-tone interior trim deliver a premium feel.

[Hyundai](#) says the Elantra Touring is the first compact five-door with standard XM Satellite Radio and USB/iPod inputs. When an iPod (or flash drive) is connected through the USB port in the console storage compartment, it can be accessed through the handy steering wheel controls, its plays through the standard audio system, and it keeps the iPod charged.

Also impressive is the amount and convenience of [interior](#) storage. There's a covered dash-top bin, a sunglass holder below the (easy to use) HVAC controls, covered two-tier storage in the central console, bottle holders in the front doors, twin cupholders front and rear, front seatbacks pockets and a hidden storage bin under the cargo area floor. And, in addition to twin 12V outlets up front, there's a third power-retained (the car does not have to be turned on) 12V plug in the cargo area—very handy for tailgating.

Styling and Driving



The SE's exterior is unusually sporty for a wagon, um, five-door. Twin long, slim air intakes flank a [Hyundai](#) "H" logo over a wide-open blackout grille. Large, tapered projection headlamps wrap over the front fenders above a pair of slim, chrome "bumperettes." Below those, the (available) fog lamps are recessed into the outer ends of the sculpted lower fascia. A rising shoulder line connects the headlamps' rearward points to huge vertical taillamps that extend from the rear fascia almost to the roof.

Who knew that [Hyundai](#)'s 138-hp 2.0-liter 16-valve DOHC four, at least in this application, would be nearly as peppy as it is fuel thrifty? Driving the front wheels through the standard five-speed manual transmission, it's not especially powerful off the line but gathers muscle as revs increase. Mid-range for merging and passing feels surprisingly strong. EPA economy ratings with the manual gearbox are 24 mpg city, 33 highway, and we logged an impressive 28.3-mpg average after more than a week of mixed city, suburban and freeway driving, according to the (available) trip computer. However, equipped as most buyers will likely have it—with the optional four-speed automatic—it will be a bit less peppy and fuel-efficient.

Who knew that this stylish and peppy little five-door (wagon) would handle the curves like a sport sedan? This is not by accident, as [Hyundai](#) says it was designed and developed from the beginning as an athletic driver's car. The surprisingly precise steering is billed as "high performance," and the MacPherson strut front and multi-link rear suspensions boast substantially stiffer springs and larger stabilizer bars compared to the Elantra sedan. The four-wheel anti-lock (ABS) disc brakes are large and strong for reliable no-fade stopping.

There are many excellent entries in today's crowded compact field, but few five-door wagons. Who knew that this one would be so appealing as well as practical and affordable? (www.hyundaiusa.com)

About the Author

Former automotive [engineer](#) Gary Witzenburg has been writing about the auto industry, its people and its products for major magazines, newspapers and web sites for more than 20 years.

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