

Hyundai Tucson



Hyundai Tucson (February 24, 2010)

The Hyundai Tucson is big and sturdy, bringing a sense of confidence to a shaky automotive market. Redesigned for 2010, the crossover is three inches longer and one inch wider. Yet bigger doesn't mean less efficient. The Tucson is also 80 pounds lighter and more fuel-efficient.

Although it comes with only one engine - last year's optional V-6 is gone - no one should despair. The new 2.4-liter four-cylinder delivers three more horsepower.

The V-6 was rated at 18 miles per gallon in the city and 24 on the highway. The new Tucson, with front-wheel drive, gets a 23 and 31 rating. Not even last year's 140-horsepower, four-cylinder version could come close. It was rated 20/26. Hyundai didn't hold back when it redid the sheet metal, either. "Fluidic sculpture" is how Hyundai's president and CEO, John Krafcik, describes the new look. As with other SUV compacts, the Tucson has front- or all-wheel drive versions. Two trim lines are offered: the GLS, which in

Hyundai tradition is anything but basic, and the upscale Limited. The front-wheel drive GLS can be equipped with a six-speed manual or automatic. All-wheel drive GLS models and all Limiteds come only with the automatic. For this review, we tested an all-wheel drive GLS.

The drivetrain included the automatic transmission and an all-wheel drive system with a locking center differential. Standard safety features include stability control, anti-lock brakes, six air bags and active front head restraints. Every power assist that could reasonably be expected is standard - air conditioning; an AM/FM/CD/MP3-playing audio system with iPod, USB and auxiliary input jacks; a tilt wheel, and cruise control.

Limited buyers receive more, as you would expect. The air conditioning is merged with an automatic, dual-zone climate control system. The upholstery turns from good-looking cloth to leather. The driver picks up a power seat and the power outside mirrors are heated, among other things.

If only performance was as luxurious. Acceleration is short of lively. Our review vehicle took 9.3 seconds to reach 60 miles per hour. That's a little better - a half-second to be exact - than the last Tucson V-6 we tried.

The good news is that performance improved once the Tucson was underway. The new engine with the six-speed automatic moved into the right gear for merging and shifted frequently and smoothly in an effort to keep to a steady 65 miles per hour on a hilly stretch of I-84. Full-throttle acceleration gets a little noisy, but the noise recedes once the car is up to speed.

The ride is firm and, at times, busy. Generally, though, it's comfortable for its affordable, crossover class.

Handling is agile and aided by an impressively stiff body structure. The steering, electric to save fuel (for more on this see the accompanying On the Road column), feels artificially heavy with little feedback. But you get used to it.

The front seats are roomy, comfortable and supportive. The rear seat is also comfortable, even for adults. Only the tallest passengers will want a little more leg room when the front seats are back. Cargo capacity is good. The split rear seats fold easily and form a nearly flat load floor, just the thing for trips to the home center.

The area where this and other Hyundais shine is value. Passengers who rode with us for a while guessed it was \$3,000 to \$5,000 more than its sticker price.

The car comes with a five-year/60,000 mile general warranty or a 10-year/100,000 mile drivetrain coverage. Low price, improved performance, an undeniable feeling of quality and lots of features suggest that this newest Tucson should be even more popular than the model it has replaced.

Paula Says...

A good value but parents of teenage drivers take note

The new Hyundai Tucson feels refined beyond its price. The exterior looks nice. The interior feels upscale.

I was particularly impressed that even with the optional navigation system, which includes a much-needed backup camera, plus another high-content options package, the price was only \$26,000. In today's market, for a vehicle like this with all its features, that's a bargain.

There are some weaknesses, however. As with most other cars, this shorter driver found the windshield pillar and left outside mirror a view blocker at intersections, though the view ahead is good and those outside mirrors cover a wide area. The bottom seat cushion is long. That's good for Jim, not so good for me.

Other than that, the Tucson is totally comfortable to drive, although you do feel more bumps than average. Also, the steering seems to resist the initial turn of the wheel, just a little. It takes more effort than I think it should. Parents of teenage drivers should note one other shortfall: You won't be able to see the speedometer from the passenger's seat.

Still, I can't get over what a value this car represents. In this market, the all-wheel drive versions should do well.