

Scott Burgess: Auto Review

2010 Genesis coupe offers drivers power, smooth ride



Las Vegas -- When Hyundai Motor Co. arrived at the car casino of America 23 years ago, the odds were not in its favor. Much like my own blackjack career, Hyundai took a beating. But who says the house always wins?

The little Korean car company kept doubling down, hand after hand. Quality problems? Offer a 10-year warranty. Scoff at its luxury aspirations? Win the North American Car of the Year award. Bad economy? Offer a ground-breaking program that will help people pay if they lose their jobs. It's not altruistic; it's good business. Now, the house is copying Hyundai.

The 2010 Hyundai Genesis coupe was another gamble. Following the critical success of the luxury Genesis sedan, the coupe could have arrived as a two-door version of the sedan. It's nothing like the sedan but it's just as impressive.

Hyundai created a sporty little rear-wheel drive racer that will appeal to grown-up tuners, their kids and anyone who wants a sports car but doesn't want to toss down \$35,000 at a dealership. Hey, we all remember that kid in high school whose parents bought him a 240Z -- at least I do. This year, there's going to be some senior cruising in a Genesis coupe -- and someone will see him through jealousy's green eyes.

The two versions of this coupe come out aces. The base model 2.0T creates 210 horsepower with its 2-liter four-cylinder turbocharged aluminum engine and provides an upgradable platform for a true tuner, a piece-by-piece enthusiast who has already circled a larger intercooler in a catalogue.

The turbocharged engine, which includes dual variable valve timing, offers a breadth of expandable parts to push the power on this model. Additionally, Hyundai will offer a track-tuned R Spec version, created for the gearhead who wants to win a few weekend races.

Ride is both agile, smooth

The base suspension includes MacPherson strut dual link in the front and a five-link rear. The track tuning adds stiffer spring rates and unique shock valving. In both cases, the ride was extremely smooth and never felt too stiff for daily driving.

Weighing 3,300 pounds, the 2.0T feels light and agile on the open road and on the track; it's faster. The hydraulic rack-and-pinion steering is precise and well-weighted. The back end kicks around just right when coming out of sharp turns at high speeds. There was only the slightest of lag at the end of the turn, but this was due to my bad driving, which caused the standard electronic stability control to kick on and limit the throttle. As soon as the car detected I was balanced again, it was full power.

The only gripe I had was the six-speed manual transmission, which would catch the reverse gate on hard shifts from first to second. It was a slight pause that would hurt you out the gate.

However, when driving the six-speed automatic, I found the shifting even faster and smoother, especially on the V-6 model.

It felt more refined and powerful. The 3.8 liter V-6 produces 306 horsepower of rumbling power.

On the track, the V-6 felt a little more sure-footed and would push itself out of turns. On the highway, it was surprisingly quiet and offered smooth riding on either the standard 18-inch wheels or the optional performance 19-inch tires.

Either model is bound to throw a typical tuner for a loop because of the rear-wheel drive platform Hyundai has developed. The difference between front- and rear-wheel drive is like moving from Parcheesi to No Limit Texas Hold 'em.

Typical tuner performance cars (imported performance machines) such as the MazdaSpeed 3, Honda Civic Si and Volkswagen GTI all use their front wheels for power. That inevitably leads to two problems. Torque steer and weight distribution.

A front-wheel-drive car tends to have a poor weight difference between the front of the car and the back -- and this can lead to handling problems. Additionally, as more power shudders through the transmission and axle, there's a tendency for the car's front end to pull to one side during hard acceleration.

The Genesis coupe has zero torque steer -- the car is pushed, not pulled. This makes it much easier to flog around a track.

The performance numbers on either model are also impressive. The 2.0T has a top speed of 137 mph, and the V-6 model can hit 149 mph.

Fast, but still a looker

No matter what trim level you pick, the Genesis coupe offers superb styling inside and out.

The exterior shines with its long hood and sloping roof. The front end sweeps back and the elongated headlamps seem to stretch the 182.3-inch car. It's well proportioned and has a taut wedge-like stance. The spoiler on the back adds to its racy looks. However, it's not posing; it looks like a race car and acts like one too. Parking lot beauty only holds up if a car performs on the road.

Inside, the Genesis coupes are comfortable and well appointed.

The dash flows nicely from the driver's side with a single piece of soft plastic. The blue instrument cluster is easy to read and there are loads of features that you'd expect in a much more expensive car. Hyundai includes an optional 360-watt Infinity stereo system and a keyless remote so you can use a push-button start. Even the center stack is simple and well laid out.

The manual shifter seemed pushed a little too far back for my liking, especially on the track, where it felt like I had to reach more to my side than in front of me. But when cruising on the highway, when I tend to sit farther back in the seat, it felt well placed.

Additionally the seats were comfortable and well bolstered to hold you in place on hard turns. The front row was well laid out and offered lots of room. The two-passenger second row was more of a holding place for a brief case or bag of groceries. I managed to squeeze myself back there for a few minutes. I

suppose it could hold small children, but even they might think sitting back there was some sort of punishment.

Perhaps the biggest risk Hyundai took with this coupe was giving it a starting price of \$22,000. The V-6 version starts at \$25,000 and both versions feel like a steal.

This is a true performance daily driver that will make whoever is behind the wheel feel like a winner.

Hyundai may have gambled with this coupe, but it looks like it's holding a winner.