

Ahead of its time all along By Joe Sage

The Hyundai Tucson compact crossover completes ten years in 2014, from its first-generation model in 2005-2009 to this second-generation model hitting five years now. Hyundai is working through a broad product lineup refresh right now, with a new Equus last year, a new Genesis Sedan earlier this year (launched here in Paradise Valley) and a new Sonata being revealed right about now.

A Hyundai Tucson Fuel Cell electric model has just made its first customer deliveries, in Southern California only, where there is a significant hydrogen fuel infrastructure in place to support it. We hope to get behind the wheel of this, and wonder whether and when that daring powertrain alternative may be available more broadly. If it's in SoCal, of course we'll all see one at some point, anyway.

The other thing we'd been waiting to see was whether it would be an adaptation of the current Tucson, or whether it might mark their opportunity to release our first look at generation three. It turns out to be the first, with a small taste of the latter, based on shots of the first ones rolling off the ships from Korea. A simple grille replacement has brought it effectively in line with the new Genesis or Sonata, but the rest remains outwardly as before. It's a clever adaptation.

The very first Tucson had been an entry level offering, when the brand was first leveraging its foothold here. But the second was what a lot of the brand's products have been since then—an up-to-date or even cutting edge product that arguably set the tone for other brands—a lot of the style and

stance of the new Ford Escape echoes this Tucson from six years ago. The 360-degree-no-corners philosophy of the new Chrysler 200, ditto. The “surfer wave” upward flow on the new Audi A3's side sheetmetal also reflects some of what's here.

Our time with the Tucson was refreshing—it's comfortable and attractive. Controls are well laid out, with setup for a new driver a breeze.

There are three trims. The base GLS has a 2.0L four and starts at \$21,450. The SE level jumps to 2.4L and the price only to \$23,500. Our line-topping Limited has the same 2.4L and also a modest base jump, to \$26,200. All have a 6-speed automatic, any is available with AWD for \$1500 more, and all deliver more than average for their price.

Add-ons for our test Tucson were modest, and you could skip them, if you want the upper level model's classy details but still want to save a buck.

Equus, Genesis and Sonata have taken significant leaps forward. Fuel Cell facelift aside, we enthusiastically await the next Tucson. Not that this one is ready to leave the party—that's the big benefit of having been ahead of the curve. ■



The 2014 Hyundai Tucson (left) becomes a 2015 Tucson Fuel Cell (right) pretty easily with just a grille (and powertrain) change.

The Tucson was ahead of its time when new in 2009 and is largely still holding its own in 2014.

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	2.4L GDI 4-cylinder
POWER/TORQUE	182 hp / 177 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION.....	6-speed Shiftronic auto
DRIVETRAIN	front-wheel drive
MPG.....	21/28/24 (city/hwy/comb)
INCLUDED:	18" alloy wheels, active ECO system, roof rails, side cladding, chrome trim, auto headlights, fog lights, power heated mirrors w turn indicators, wiper deicers, keyless entry-start, leather seat surfaces w heated front, power driver's seat, leather-wrap wheel and shift knob, dual zone auto climate w ionizer, retractable cargo cover, auto-dim mirror w HomeLink, tilt/telescope wheel w controls, rear camera, 4.3" touchscreen, AM-FM-CD-MP3 audio w iPod-USB-aux input, bluetooth, Blue Link telematics, full tank of gas.

BASE PRICE.....	\$26,495
BASE DISCOUNT:.....	(295)
TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE:	Panoramic tilt/slide sunroof, LED taillights, navigation with 7" touchscreen display, premium audio with subwoofer
	2750
TECH PACKAGE DISCOUNT:.....	(100)
CARPETED FLOOR MATS:.....	110
DESTINATION CHARGE:.....	875
TOTAL	\$29,835

LOGBOOK NOTES

The shifter itself doesn't really line up with PRND to its side, but this is made up for by an adjacent dot indicating which position you're in. Lack of an L helps avoid errors.

Each radio station seems to need its own tone settings—intended as a benefit, but a mixed blessing. In repeat testing of this, we usually found it necessary, but not always.

Tucson has 25.7 cu.ft. of cargo behind rear seats, 55.8 cu.ft. if folded, but three issues: the seats don't lie flat; headrests aggravate this further; and the cargo cover rail blocks some space and movement of large boxes.

If you really get into cargo use, the leather surface of the folded back seat wraps around its top, vulnerable to scuffing or frayed edges as you slide things in and out.

