

TRENDSETTER

THE COMPACT CROSSOVER THAT INFLUENCES EVERYBODY TAKES ANOTHER GIANT STEP

BY JOE SAGE



As a new Escape was looming for 2012, we looked forward to a down-scaled Explorer. Instead, that next Escape has always struck us as highly derivative of the gen-two Hyundai Tucson that had been in the market since 2009. We easily mistook one for the other more than once from a distance. This to us suggests Hyundai segment leadership.

Even sister brand Kia distinguishes itself—their entry in the segment, the Sportage, has its own style, shape and character. Tucson for 2016 has doubled down on its identity, adopting nose, tail and overall sheet metal cues working their way into the rest of the Hyundai lineup, originating with the multiple-award-winning premium Genesis Sedan.

of that). Toyota RAV4 and Ford Escape had been on the scene for just a few years; Honda CR-V did not yet exist. The term “crossover” had not caught on yet. Compact crossovers now jockey with midsize sedans as the number one segment in our market.

Hyundai’s styling cues over the past few years seem to influence everyone from BMW to Ford. Take long time compact crossover segment leader Ford Escape. When a new Explorer midsize SUV was introduced in 2011, it bore its own new rugged yet stylish look.

Hyundai Tucson is significant three key ways: in its relationship with its competition, in its relationship with other vehicles in the Hyundai lineup, and in its own right. Tucson is all new for 2016.

TUCSON'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

Hyundai Tucson arrived in the US in 2004, a pioneer in a new segment (in fact, it graced our cover way back then, for the significance



We chose a Tucson Sport AWD from the fleet in Minneapolis and headed down the mighty Mississippi, over the river and through the woods into Wisconsin—often in very heavy rain—then south to waterfront Pepin, site of *Little House in the Big Woods*, the historical masterpiece by Laura Ingalls Wilder and precursor to *Little House on the Prairie*. (We were oblivious to all that and had never read them, but now we have.)

TUCSON'S PLACE IN THE LINEUP

Hyundai has an almost unique approach to the midsize crossover market (Mitsubishi does something similar)—offering a 7-passenger Santa Fe and also a 5-passenger Santa Fe Sport. These defined a realm in the Hyundai lineup, with the Tucson in a separate orbit. The most significant evolution of the 2016 Tucson is that it also gets in sync with the Santa Fe and Santa Fe Sport.

One look at our comparative chart (sidebar) tells the tale. The three stairstep their specifications in a way that makes a decision come down to personal needs and tastes. The increasingly larger models move up the scale in power, size, cargo and towing capacities. Fuel mileage is, as expected, best with the smallest one. Turning circles confirm the compact Tucson as the most maneuverable of all, although they are all close: the Tucson beats a Mini Cooper on this, but even the 7-passenger Santa Fe is within a foot and a half of the Mini (and Santa Fe Sport just a couple of inches). Front headroom and legroom are surprisingly basically identical.

A quick spotter's guide tip: Santa Fe's side window opening runs pretty much straight all the way to the rear; Santa Fe Sport's kinks uphill toward the rear; and Tucson's sort of comes to a point.

TUCSON'S PLACE IN YOUR LIFE

Product planners work with concepts way beyond small, medium and large. The new 1-2-3 approach of Tucson, Santa Fe Sport and Santa Fe has them aimed at specific demographics, each broadly defined along an age continuum. The compact Tucson is perfect for singles and young couples—the most price-conscious group—delivering style and utility for days in the city as well as active weekends. Once the kids arrive, the biggest one, the Santa Fe (seating 6 or 7) is for family duty, with

plenty of room and the ruggedness to survive it all in style. Mature families and empty nesters with fewer butts in seats have the nimble middle model, the Santa Fe Sport. (Any specific towing needs will be a wild card for some buyers.)

For the Tucson, its significant styling update—by their European team—and constant expansion of safety and technology features are accompanied by performance and dynamic advances. Its new 1.6-liter turbo is rated at 33 MPG highway, with 175 hp and a healthy 195 lb-ft of torque. (A carry-over 2.0L naturally aspirated engine is close in horsepower though 22 percent lower in torque.)

The Santa Fe siblings carry more horses (and can tow more), but at a tradeoff in fuel economy. Tucson has a segment-first 7-speed EcoShift® dual clutch transmission, a tightly geared lightweight wonder with electric clutch and gear actuators and a compact three-shaft structure that predicts and executes shifts instantaneously.

Tucson's innovative new AWD system makes a lot of sense: rather than applying brakes to fight unwanted wheelspin (a reactive approach), it applies torque to the grippiest wheels (a proactive solution), powering you through in confidence.

Tucson's 12-inch ventilated front and 11.9-inch solid rear discs, applied at 60 mph, stop the vehicle in 130 feet, beating Escape, CR-V and RAV4, all, by as much as six feet.

Three drive modes include Eco and Sport. Sport remaps engine and transmission for a more immediate power curve, quicker upshifts and a longer hold before downshifts, while also goosing the steering feel a bit. Eco mode leaves normal steering, but remaps engine and transmission for less aggression but better fuel mileage.

Tucson's stylish and modern exterior includes

KEEP RIGHT >>



Tucson vs Santa Fe Sport vs Santa Fe	T (5P)	SFS (5P)	SF (6/7P)
Model (seats)	5	5	6/7
Engines	2.0, 1.6T	2.4, 2.0T	3.3 V6
Horsepower	164, 175	190, 265	290
Torque	151, 195	181, 269	252
Towing	1500	2000	5000
Max MPG	33	27	25
Wheelbase	105.1	106.3	110.2
Length	176.2	184.6	193.1
Width	72.8	74.0	74.2
Height	64.8	66.1	66.5
Turning circle	34.9	35.8	36.9
Headroom, fr	39.6	39.6	39.6
Legroom, fr	41.5	41.3	41.3
Interior vol	133.2	143.4	160.0
Cargo 3 rows	-	-	13.5
Cargo 2 rows	31.0	35.4	40.9
Cargo 1 row	61.9	71.5	80.0
Starting at	\$22,700	\$24,950	\$30,400

twin-projector headlights, LED running lights, LED taillights and chrome-tipped dual exhaust. The combination of available 19-inch alloy wheels and clever use of a black lower body element running from the rocker panel around both wheel arches emphasizes a look that is athletic, lean and ready to pounce. An available panoramic sunroof gives an expansive feeling both front and rear.

For the Tucson's all-new interior, the design team applied touchstones found in everything from the most futuristic and energetic guitars, mountain bikes and ski goggles, to the famous sweeping architecture of Eero Saarinen. The resulting cockpit is gorgeous, comfortable, sporty and provides a clear interface for all its features.

Two segment firsts are particularly welcome in our climate: Tucson is first with ventilated front seats and first adding heated rear seats. A 5-inch color touchscreen is standard, an 8-incher in the top trim model. All include a backup camera.

Hyundai always has exceptional audio, and the Tucson comes with a 405-watt 8-speaker system.

BlueLink services—emergency assistance, collision notification, maintenance alerts and more—are widely popular. Remote vehicle starts have in the first six months already about doubled last year's total, en route to fourfold growth. BlueLink apps make the system accessible via all popular smartphones and now also via all popular smartwatches, all of which were demonstrated to us.

Tucson's cargo space is five cubic feet larger than the old model—dramatically illustrated to us at our presentation on the University of Minnesota campus with a complete year's worth of dorm room gear spread out to fill a room. A hands-free smart liftgate works when you are within three feet of it for more than three seconds. No foot-wagging needed. The liftgate is height-adjustable, too, to accommodate low clearances.

Most smaller vehicles are growing a little in

size right now, and as the new Tucson stair-stepped its way to the new 8.5-inch length increment between it and Santa Fe Sport, the same as between Santa Fe Sport and Santa Fe, it has been given three more inches of length and an inch or so of width, while dropping the roofline about half an inch, yet matching the headroom of the Santa Fe.

Suspension has several new innovations, from new bushing mounts, heftier shocks and hydraulic rebound springs to a new lightweight hollow stabilizer bar up front, and in the rear a comprehensive new dual lower arm assembly and a hollow stabilizer bar for both 2WD and 4WD models.

A range of unibody structural advances boost crashworthiness, while the vehicle includes front and side-curtain airbags with rollover sensors.

On our introduction drive—running along the Mississippi River, over hill and dale on beautiful two-lanes, often in very slick rainstorm conditions, pounding along dirt roads, and on the Twin Cities' freeways and Interstates—the 1.6-liter turbo propelled the Tucson like a champ.

High-strength steel content stands at 51 percent, boosting rigidity by 48 percent, contributing to Tucson's confident ride quality, while keeping this rugged little ute at a trim 3500 pounds or so. Road noise has been significantly reduced and aerodynamics significantly improved.

We drove the AWD for many miles through Minnesota and Wisconsin—on high-speed paved roads, in torrential rains, on loose gravel roads, and for one stretch on a magnificent combination of both rain and gravel, where huge, deep water

hazards had accumulated—which not one of us could resist powering through, at least once.

Power, control and grip were tops in all conditions, and the cabin was inviting and secure.

The 2016 Tucson is available in eight colors, of which six (everything other than black and white) are new. Favorites during the media event were a lively Caribbean Blue, a rich Mojave Sand (shown below) and a deep red Sedona Sunset. That's right, Arizona, we can get a Tucson in Sedona paint. Three different interior colors have a fabric finish in three trims, leather in top Luxury trim. Parents and midnight snackers rejoice: cloth seats are of impressive YES Essentials fabric. At our presentation, milk, coffee, Kool-aid and soy sauce were all splashed onto this fabric, only to remain beaded up on the surface for an easy wipe clean.

Hyundai now ranks 4th in JD Power Initial Quality Studies (behind only Porsche, sibling Kia and Jaguar, and above BMW, Cadillac, Honda, Mercedes-Benz and all the rest). And they still give you the same 10-year, 100,000-mile warranty with 24/7 roadside assistance.

The 2016 Hyundai Tucson is a tour de force, easily complementing the highly successful Santa Fe pair. This is a considerably crowded segment, but the Tucson is by far one of the most competitive vehicles in it. Hyundai has increased plant capacity for the Tucson, expecting to about double its US sales in 2016, to 90,000 units. ■

Launched in Minneapolis with a theme of "Urban Adventure," the 2016 Hyundai Tucson was equally happy with a long drive through the Wisconsin countryside.

