

Elegant, generous, wired

BY JOE SAGE

“Fluidic sculpture” eye-catching styling really put Hyundai on the map, bringing attention to the brand’s notable combination of value, style and features. Sheer sales volume for the fluidic Elantra made it a force multiplier for this effort. The fifth generation of the little Elantra in 2011 had become stunning, and its dramatic skin seemed to emphasize that no corners had been cut—and in fact much had been added—even in the under-\$20k range of their volume compact.

The sixth-generation 2017 Hyundai Elantra now follows Genesis (soon becoming its own brand) and Sonata into more refined, mature styling. All are still immediately recognizable, now that the brand’s presence is so firmly established. It’s clean, clear evolution, in which family personality still shines through.

Styling is just one part of the new Elantra, along with big advances in vehicle dynamics, connectivity and features. We went to California to get our hands on the new car.

We flew to San Diego to join the Elantra team in Imperial Beach—the closest town to Mexico on the US Pacific coast. We would drive inland from there, high up into the hills, for a broad sampling of the car’s power, handling, technology and creature comforts.

For our drive, we had the top Limited trim listed in our specifications sidebar. However, not only can you get into Elantra in base SE trim for just \$17,150, you also have the option of a 6-speed manual transmission with that model. The whole lineup is simple, in fact: SE

or Limited, both with a 147-hp Atkinson Cycle 2.0L four-cylinder. (There will be a new Eco model joining the lineup soon, with a 128-hp 1.4L engine and 7-speed dual clutch transmission, good for another 2 MPG or so.)

The additional \$5,200 for Limited—really just \$4,200, when comparing automatics—brings you dramatic 17-inch alloy wheels plus a host of other appealing features including LED daytime running lights and taillights, auto headlights, hands-free smart trunk, heated leather seats, power driver’s seat, keyless entry and start, leather wheel and shift knob, and a number of other upgrades. Limited also includes blind spot detection and rear cross-traffic alert, invaluable for young families, and a 3.5-inch TFT multi-info binnacle display, plus 7-inch color touchscreen system, along with both Android Auto and Apple CarPlay integration and Blue Link connected car telematics.

A number of the Limited’s advantages can be added to the SE as options and packages,

so manual transmission aficionados are also able to build a satisfying new Elantra.

Expanded driver technology options—forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection, lane departure warning and lane keep assistance, and smart cruise control—are options for the Limited trim but not the SE.

The SE has the same powertrain and suspension as the Limited (although drive mode select is standard on the Limited, optional on SE). The base SE is about 200 pounds lighter due to feature set, earning fuel mileage one point higher across the board, hitting 38 MPG highway with the automatic or 36 with a manual (EPA test cycles favor the automatic).

Our Limited was rounded out with two comprehensive and nicely priced packages shown in the sidebar, including upsizing of both screens and the irresistible core of any well-built Hyundai—an Infinity sound system, this one featuring their impressive new Clari-Fi Music Restoration technology that builds compressed music back to the full breadth and depth it was born with.

Time was, buying a small car meant buying an “economy car,” with small size, low price, slim features and low panache. Those days are completely in the rear view mirror with

Elantra. Much as Tucson, Santa Fe Sport and Santa Fe give you the same complete package in a range of sizes of crossover, so it is now with the Elantra and its bigger brothers.

Market research bears out a shift in compact segment purchase decisions from the head to the heart. Hyundai has fleshed out a small car that pleases and satisfies both.

Even with the fluidic look played down, the new Elantra has its aerodynamics tweaked to where it beats Corolla, Focus, even Nissan Leaf. This contributes not only to fuel economy, but also the new model’s comprehensive improvements in noise, vibration and harshness throughout. The unibody structure uses more high strength steel (up from 21 percent to 53 percent), structural adhesives (over 390 feet) and reinforcements, for advances both in cabin quiet and impact safety.

Suspension receives expanded insulation and dampening. Dramatically updated new geometry both front and rear improves steering, handling and stability.

The new Elantra maintains its efficient size, still delivering a generous EPA-spec midsize cabin within its compact shell, as spacious as a Cadillac CTS and moreso than a BMW 3 Series or Audi A4.

A new horizontal instrument layout emphasizes spaciousness while making primary

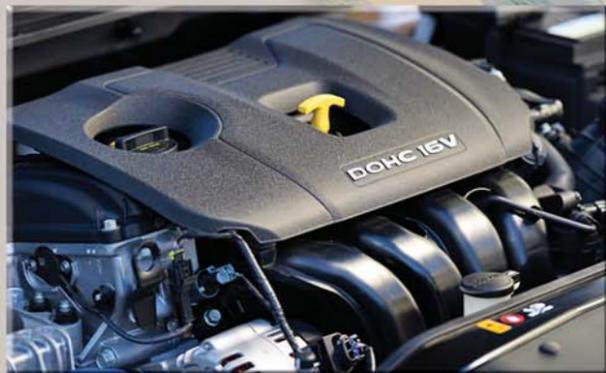
2017 HYUNDAI ELANTRA LIMITED

ENGINE.....	2.0L DOHC dual contin. VVT 4-cyl
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	147 hp / 132 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd auto w/ Shiftronic®
TURNING CIRCLE	34.78 ft
WEIGHT	2976 lb
MPG	28/37/32 city/hwy/comb
TRUNK VOLUME	14.4 cu.ft.
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	179.9 in / 106.3 in

INCLUDED: ESC, ABS, front/side/curtain/knee airbags, hill assist, blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert, rear camera w/ dynamic guidelines, 17-in alloy wheels, LED DRLs and taillights, side mirror turn indicators, door handle approach lights, 6-spkr display audio w/ 7-in touchscreen, SiriusXM, dual USB charging, BlueLink connected car system, dual auto climate w/ defogger, Bluetooth hands-free phone, wheel-mounted audio and cruise, power driver’s seat w/ lumbar, leather seat surfaces, heated front seats, rear center armrest/cupholders, proximity key, pushbutton start, hands-free smart trunk.....*incl*

BASE PRICE (ADVANCE PKG)	\$22,350
TECH PACKAGE: Nav AVN 4.0, 8" touchscreen, 4.2" TFT cluster display, Infinity 8-spkr premium audio w/ center channel, subwoofer & Clari-Fi Music Restoration technology, Android Auto & Apple CarPlay, heated front/rear seats, power sunroof, auto-dim mirror, HomeLink, compass	2500
ULTIMATE PACKAGE: Auto emergency braking w/pedestrian detect, smart cruise control, lane keep assist, HID headlights w/dynamic bending light, memory driver’s seat and side mirrors	1900
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	125
DESTINATION CHARGE	835
TOTAL	\$27,710





functions highly intuitive. Besides being a size above, the extensive feature and technology set is built to deliver "a class above."

All of these advances were apparent in our drive. If we had been planted inside, blindfolded, before we pressed the start button, we would not have known this was a compact car, nor would we have known it was such an affordable car. We drove the new Elantra several hundred challenging and exhilarating miles and could have continued for days. At over six feet, we remained comfortable and purposeful, as the Elantra enthusiastically delivered curves, hills and straights.

We welcome the availability of a manual, but most buyers do opt for the automatic, and the full feature set of the Limited is very enticing. The automatic is another new piece, in fact, a unit with the precision of a Swiss watch, using double ball bearings, a much smaller oil pump, direct control solenoids and a multi-disk torque converter to deliver smooth power and fuel efficiency with just six well-spaced and generally invisible speeds. Eco, normal and sport modes are perfectly mapped for your own best bargain between performance gained through sport's torque boost via delayed shifts or eco's longer time between fuel stops.

If this is your size and/or your price, you will find Hyundai Elantra a supremely capable car, on a par with the larger Sonata and even the Genesis (front-vs-rear-drive aside). If you compare specifications throughout, you find all the technology of a \$50k-plus Genesis just a year and a half ago is in the \$20k-plus Elantra now. Beyond impressive.

It's enough to make us wonder what might join



Imperial Beach is the southernmost beach town in California—14 miles south of San Diego and 5 miles northwest of Tijuana—and has the southernmost pier. To the south in the US are protected estuaries, so the view at night is of a dark gap, then the lights of Tijuana and Playa de Tijuana, Mexico.

the Hyundai lineup in the full-size niche opened up by Genesis and Equus brand migration (the Hyundai Azera will probably hit its stride here), and what might be in store for a next-gen subcompact Accent. There is also the all-new IONIQ hybrid and plug-in hybrid arriving later in the year. With no compromise, you have easy choices. ■

