

Tucson To Tucson by Joe Sage

We have times we wish some lineups with three or even two sizes of SUV or crossover made all three more similar, because perhaps we like one very well and we like the size of another. In other lineups, we like it that all are different from one another for their own comparative reasons. Hyundai used to have the variety pack. With the arrival of this all-new Tucson last fall, they now have the coordinated threesome. In this case, we very much like the fact that much the same vehicle comes in three sizes now. It's such a well executed vehicle, all you have to do is pick a size.

The naming scheme for the threesome is ev-

olutionary. The 5-seat Santa Fe Sport (replacing the old Santa Fe) and then the 7-seat Santa Fe (displacing the Veracruz) came out in 2012. This all-new Tucson followed three years later and kept the name of its forebear, though it now completes a perfect large-medium-small triad.

There are four models in the Tucson lineup. A \$22,700 base SE model has a natural-aspirated 2-liter engine and 6-speed automatic. Eco, Sport and Limited have a 1.6-liter turbo and a segment-first 7-speed dual clutch transmission, a tightly geared lightweight unit with electric clutch and gear actuators and a compact three-shaft structure that predicts and executes shifts instantaneously. All four are available either as FWD or with a new AWD system that applies torque to the grippiest wheels (a proactive solution, rather than reactively braking as many systems do). Disc brakes—12-inch ventilated front and 11.9-inch solid rear—stop the vehicle in 130 feet.

The Eco model keeps smaller wheels and such from the SE, but does move to the turbo. Sport and Limited successively add style and features, topping out at a base \$29,900 for a Limited FWD or \$31,300 for Limited AWD, our model here.



We find the Tucson's controls to be among the best—with infotainment concentrated in the touchscreen and vehicle settings concentrated in the binnacle, the whole setup quite intuitive. We made quick first-time new-owner changes easily, such as turning off the happy little welcome song.

We gave our Tucson a meaningful week, highlighted by some heavy print magazine hauling and—what else—a road trip to Tucson.

Even during a run in which we had hundreds of pounds of printed magazines in the back, we felt low, wide, solid and sure on sweeping freeway flyovers. Steering and handling were beyond impressive—German all-wheel-drive sports coupe impressive, with zero front-drive torque—and we really enjoyed putting our foot into it.

Tucson is a very round two hours from Phoenix,

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN	1.6L 4-cyl / AWD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	175 hp / 195 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	7-spd EcoShift dual clutch
SEATING CAPACITY	5 passengers
TURNING CIRCLE	34.9 ft
WEIGHT	3499-3710 lb
TOWING (w/o trailer brakes)	1000 / (with) 1500 lb
MPG	(7-spd AWD) 24/28/26 city/hwy/comb
CARGO VOLUME	31.0 cu.ft / 61.9 cu.ft
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	176.2 in / 105.1 in
BASE PRICE	\$31,300
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	125
CARGO COVER	190
DESTINATION CHARGE	895
TOTAL	\$32,510

but starting in the north Valley, stopping for photos several times and taking a scenic route back, we drove for about nine hours total. We rocked out to the Tucson's 405-watt 8-speaker audio. We continued to note solid handling and those powerful sweeps through turns—delivered by just 175 turbo horses—whether on the freeways, surface streets or beautiful open two-lane highways. In Tucson, we took one rough alley with bomb crater-grade potholes and still found the vehicle smooth, firm, strong and impressive.

We had already found that this is one of those vehicles with which you start making up extra errands or start taking the long way home—just a satisfying driving machine. At the end of our nine-hour day (and your correspondent pushes six-foot-two), it was still comfortable and we would have been perfectly happy to keep going.

Hyundai has increased its Alabama plant capacity for the new Tucson, expecting to double its US sales this year. This seems a wise move. ■



Phoenix to Tucson on I-10 is the most obvious route, but there are many alternatives, via Highway 77 through Catalina and Oro Valley north of Tucson, via Superior on US 60, or via Florence on Highway 79, each with subset options. We returned via Florence on Hwy 79 and US 60. All of these routes are highly recommended, if you have the time (the two-lanes are fast, but Oracle Road in the northern fringes is slow). Special thanks to colleague Anthony Vito for scouting out Tucson signage highlights.



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