

# Streamliner

Styling and lineup are both streamlined in this updated midsize sedan. BY JOE SAGE

Midsize sedans were the biggest market segment for a long time, but have juggled against compact crossovers for the top spot for awhile now. In fact, at the moment, midsize sedans have slipped to the number four spot (behind pickups, compact crossovers and compact cars—while midsize SUVs have stayed in the number five spot). More than 16 percent of the market as recently as 2012, midsize sedans are forecast to be at around 10 percent for the next several years.

Hyundai is addressing this trend with its popular Sonata midsize sedan by reducing less profitable fleet sales brandwide by almost 30 percent, concentrating on retail sales, which are up, and by making the midsize sedan more competitive as the situation stabilizes. Stable it should be, as some 63 percent of current midsize sedan owners will buy the same again. About 57 percent of compact crossover buyers will stick with that segment, too, but close to 20 percent of each will switch to the other, meaning over 80 percent of the two groups will be shopping midsize sedans next time.

The solution starts with this new Sonata. The model has a head start, with the highest brand awareness of any Hyundai model in the US and almost three million sold since 1989, accounting for 31 percent of Hyundai sales and 18 percent of conquest sales (buyers who come to Hyundai from other brands) in the US. The new Sonata is an all-American endeavor, penned at Hyundai's California

Design Studio and built at their Alabama plant.

This is a refresh, although you would be excused for taking it to be an all new build. All that remains on the outside from the prior model are the doors, roofline and part of the rear quarter panels. The rest has been redesigned as it has been redefined—as a “technical sprinter,” expressive, emotional, distinctive and precise—with innovative technology and features, including many included at every trim level (and only from Hyundai; see specifications sidebar).

Up front on most trims is a new “cascading” grille, with two-level bars that create rich dimension and flow. Sport models feature an aggressive chain-link grille. Rear sheet metal benefits from the license plate being moved low (a sleek presentation we recently saw applied to another new car at three times the price). Alloy wheels have been redesigned (17- and 18-inch, or 16-inch on SE and Eco), and LED lighting is used from front to rear (on top trims), with distinctive stacked DRLs. Aerodynamic hood, fender and headlight shapes converge toward the front, offset by a “catamaran” chrome element bridging the LED inlets and grille to create a wide, fast wave-skimming feel.

The interior has been upgraded to a more premium feel, including a new instrument panel and center stack, three-spoke sport wheel, piano-key buttons for audio and climate controls, and seven-inch touchscreen with Apple and Android connec-

tivity. Wireless smartphone charging is available, and back seat passengers gain a USB charge port.

Engine choices remain the same: a 2.4-liter GDI four-cylinder across four trim levels (SE, SEL, Sport and Limited); a high-output twin-scroll turbo 2.0-liter four (Sport and Limited); and a 1.6-liter twin-scroll turbo for the most fuel-economical and second-lowest purchase price Eco model. The two-liter turbo models have a new 8-speed automatic transmission, mapped over a wider spread at both ends to boost both performance and fuel economy.

It takes a moment of mental adjustment to realize that the sportier 2.0L turbo comes in both Sport and Limited models, while the base 2.4L engine also comes in Sport and Limited (as well as SE and SEL trims). If your sporting blood tends toward style points, you have a choice of naturally aspirated or turbocharged engines. If your sporting blood tends toward performance (the 2.0L turbo), you have a choice of Sport or Limited trim.

We drove both engines and both trims throughout San Diego County, inland where the mountain and desert two-lanes really open up. Our sporting blood tends toward performance, so we chose to spend more time in the 260-hp 2.0T. Suspension is always an area where Hyundai pays extra attention, and all models have been upgraded again in the new model, with rear suspension receiving 21 percent thicker trailing arms for heavier loading, and new bushings for more ride compliance and quicker response. Torsion bar stiffness is increased 12 percent, and steering has been recalibrated, together delivering a more responsive system with improved on-center feel. Steering is



speed-sensitive in all models.

Luxury trim adds several style points, creature comforts (one-touch passenger-side window, for example) and driver assistance features. The final choice is partly hard and partly easy, once you compare the seven basic builds. Concentrating on Sport and Limited (and their two available engines), the price walk to Limited is just \$2200, not bad for a few more features, if you don't mind trading off the chain-link grille, dual exhaust tips, rear diffuser and such of the Sport. If you've decided between Sport and Limited and are choosing engines, it's only \$2400 to jump to the 2.0T in Sport—an easy decision—while it add \$5050 to the Limited. In fact, a 2.4L Limited and a 2.0T Sport

are almost exactly the same price. But the 2.4L Limited does not have all the inclusions of the 2.0T Limited. The price/feature differential is equalized if you go for a 2.4L Limited with Ultimate Package.

At the starting end of the lineup, the 2.4L SE and the 1.6T Eco turbo are just \$600 apart. The Eco comes in one point higher on highway fuel mileage than the SE, but in city traffic beats all others by three to five MPG. Although its horsepower is lower, its torque is higher than the 2.4-liter, and it uniquely has a 7-speed dual clutch transmission, something evocative of a sports sedan, though this one is mapped for fuel economy. Tough call.

The new Hyundai Sonata is at dealers now. Hybrid and plug-in hybrid models arrive in 2018. ■

Sonata's visual strength carries through its smoothed and simplified side panels via a powerful “saber line” front to rear. The car's rear sheet metal appears wider, stronger and faster—and has classier brand presence—with the license plate moved down. The trunk release is hidden in the Hyundai badge (or can be operated hands-free in SEL models and up).



## SPECIFICATIONS

### 2.4L (SE, SEL, Limited, Sport)

ENGINE .....2.4L DOHC D-CVVT 4-cyl  
HORSEPOWER / TORQUE .....185 hp / 178 lb-ft  
TRANSMISSION ...6-spd auto w manual mode  
STEERING .....column-mounted motor-driven power rack & pinion, engine-RPM-sensing  
WHEELS .....17x7 alum alloy / (SE: 16x6.5)  
TIRES .....P215/55R17 / (SE: P205/65R16)  
WEIGHT .....SE 3250 lb; SEL 3311 lb Limited, Sport TBD  
MPG (city/hwy/comb) .....SE: 25/36/29 .....SEL, Limited, Sport: 25/35/28

### 2.0L Turbo (Sport, Limited)

ENGINE ..2.0L twin-scroll turbo D-CVVT 4-cyl  
HORSEPOWER / TORQUE .....245 hp / 260 lb-ft  
TRANSMISSION ...8-spd auto w manual mode  
STEERING ...dual-pinion rack-mounted motor-driven pwr rack & pinion, eng-RPM-sens  
WHEELS .....18x7.5 alum alloy  
TIRES .....P235/45R18  
WEIGHT .....Sport 3483 / Limited 3527 lb  
MPG .....23/32/26 (city/hwy/comb)

### 1.6L Turbo (Eco)

ENGINE ..1.6L twin-scroll turbo D-CVVT 4-cyl  
HORSEPOWER / TORQUE .....178 hp / 195 lb-ft  
TRANSMISSION .....7-spd eco-shift DCT  
STEERING .....column-mounted motor-driven power rack & pinion, engine-RPM-sensing  
WHEELS .....16x6.5 alum alloy  
TIRES .....P205/65R16  
WEIGHT .....3247  
MPG .....28/37/31 (city/hwy/comb)

### DRIVETRAIN .....FWD

SUSPENSION: FRONT: MacPherson strut w gas-charged dual flow damper (DFD) shocks, 23-mm stabilizer bar.  
REAR: indep multi-link w coils, gas-charged DFD shocks, 17-mm stblzr bar  
BRAKES: FRONT: dual diagonal, split circuit, power-assist 12.0-in vented disc w pressure proportioning valves (12.6-in optional on SEL and Limited).  
REAR: dual diagonal, split circuit, power assist 11.2-in solid disc w pressure proportioning valves  
LENGTH / WHEELBASE .....191.1 / 110.4 in  
TURNING CIRCLE .....35.8 ft  
GROUND CLEARANCE .....5.3 in  
HEADROOM (F/R) .....40.4 / 38.0 in  
LEGROOM (F/R) .....45.5 / 35.6 in  
PASSENGER VOLUME .....106.1 cu.ft  
CARGO VOLUME .....16.3 cu.ft  
FUEL CAPACITY .....18.5 gal

### 2018 Hyundai Sonata pricing

Sonata 2.4L	SE	\$22,050
	SEL	\$23,700
	Sport	\$25,200
	Limited	\$27,400
	Limited Ult	\$30,300
Sonata 2.0L Turbo	Sport	\$27,600
	Limited	\$32,450
Sonata 1.6L Turbo	Eco	\$22,650

**NOTABLE INCLUSIONS/OPTIONS:** Every 2018 Sonata includes Blind Spot Detection with Rear Cross Traffic Alert, the only mainstream midsize car with these standard. Available Lane Departure Warning now adds Lane Keep Assist. All 2018 Sonatas have standard 7-inch touchscreen with Apple/Android. Models with Blue Link Telematics get 3 years of complimentary Connected Care and remote services. Many features work with Amazon Echo and Google Home. Available navigation has bird's eye view, realtime traffic data and includes 3 years of update downloads.