

Accent on content and form

Econo? Yes. Car? Of course. Econocar? No, it's much more. BY JOE SAGE

There was a time when a small car meant, to not mince words, a cheap car. With the Hyundai Accent, those days are long gone. Still small, still inexpensive, the all-new Accent is anything but "cheap." Features and inclusions on even the base model are extensive.

Creating the smallest car in a lineup is full of challenges: cost must be kept down, but can only go so low, especially as competitive technologies and features are folded in; and a full range of trims has to offer a distinctive stairstep of price and features, while still leaving headroom for the next model up (in this case, the Hyundai Elantra).

An entry point vehicle—generally the smallest in the lineup—also has to be better than what a buyer might find in the used or certified preowned market in the same price range, a huge challenge in a commodity well known for fast depreciation.

Standard categorizations by size—subcompact, compact, midsize, full-size—have become quite fuzzy over the past several years. Vehicles grow bulkier for airbags, side beams, rollover protection and impact protection, yet simultaneously slimmer to keep fuel-gobbling weight down, yet more spacious inside, to attract American consumers in particular. Much of this has been accomplished with tremendous advances in strong, lightweight steel components. (One highly valid bragging point from Hyundai is that they are the only leading manufacturer with their own steel

foundry, giving them the opportunity to not only create tailor-made lightweight parts, but to keep their costs down while doing so.)

Today, you can get more than you pay for, especially in smaller models. The Hyundai Sonata is clearly a midsize sedan, while the compact Elantra (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) brings you pretty much a midsize cabin at compact prices. The new subcompact Accent, in turn, now brings you pretty much a compact cabin at subcompact prices. There are many reasons this new sedan is a breakthrough.

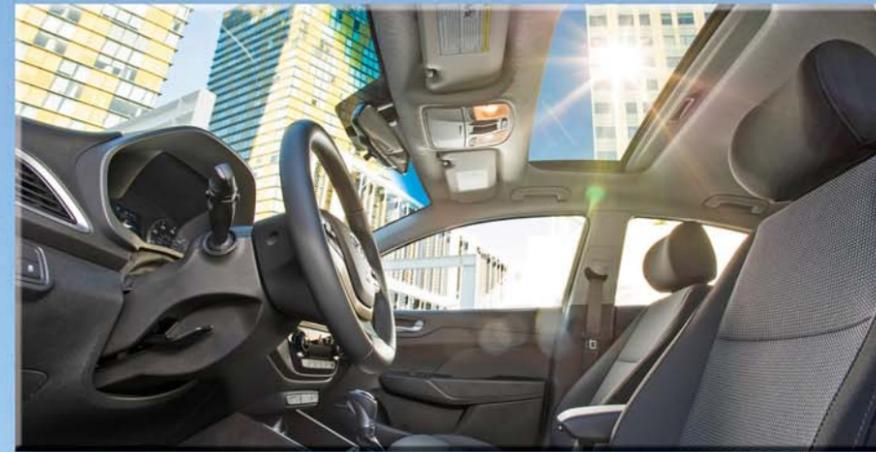
The main design challenge around creating a small car is not necessarily all its inclusions—those are competitive elements, subjectively included in planning and the final product. The objective challenge is that people are the same size, no matter what car they get in. Simply size down the wheels, engine compartment and trunk, and you will get a car with a "bubbly" look. Hyundai tackled this challenge head-on with the new Accent, and the results are plain to see—the bubble is nowhere to be seen—while the techniques to achieve this are more subtle. The "daylight opening" (or DLO—the side window profile, most of all) benefits from a win-win aerodynamically sloping windshield and rear glass, accentuated by a chrome beltline molding that extends from a blacked-out extension of the A-pillar to another blacked-out extension behind the C-pillar.

But it's more than an optical illusion. They have created a spatial miracle. The balance achieved is

perfect: a longer, larger cabin—with volume above its statutory size—that makes the car look longer, lower and more cohesive, not smaller or shorter. The car actually is larger, but only by a hair—0.6" longer on a wheelbase 0.4" longer, and 1.2" wider. Well-planted 17-inch alloy wheels (on top Limited trim) top off this study in scale and balance.

We met up with Hyundai in Las Vegas to get behind the wheel of the all-new fifth-generation 2018 Hyundai Accent. We worked our way quickly out of the city and headed north on I-15—urban freeway followed by several dozen open Interstate miles that would lead us to the righteous two-lane desert twisties in Valley of Fire State Park. From there, it was cross-country to drive across Hoover Dam into Arizona (then walk across and back).

The Accent held three of us comfortably—three guys over six feet tall each, in fact. And within our first dozen miles or so, we agreed this car was comfortable, well equipped, straight and smooth handling, and spacious enough to just keep cruising all the way to Salt Lake City, if we felt like it. Within a dozen more miles, we agreed it would be fine to cruise all the way to the northmost point on I-15—Sweet Grass, Montana. A few more miles and—you guessed it—we were ready to continue on up into Alberta, as far as Calgary or Edmonton, easy. Well, two of us were, anyway. The rear seat occupant said he was indeed comfortable, but did have his knees touching the front seatbacks. That's not surprising, in the smallest of Hyundai's sedan lineup—which climbs from Accent up to Elantra (an EPA-ranked compact with a midsize cabin) and



Sonata (a midsize with a full-size cabin). But move him to the front with his wife and load the kids into the back? Yep, they could drive all day, all the way.

Exuberant performance through two-lanes with significant hills and curves makes us surprised this 38-mpg fuel-sipper has just 130 hp—but the car weighs just 2500 pounds or so, pro-rata equivalent to over 200 hp in a 4000-pound sedan. Accent also has highly reengineered suspension, with new, near-vertically-mounted twin-tube rear shocks and coils, introduced earlier on pricier models, as well as a quieter cabin via stiffened subframe, much more NVH blocking and better wind seals.

Inclusions are plentiful (see sidebar). Features included on even the base trim, if priced as options on many other brands, could easily add up to more than the entire price of the Hyundai Accent. Class-above features include highly useful (and accurate) dynamic guidelines on the rear camera, keyless entry, power mirrors and windows, a wide range of

handling electronics, wheel-mounted cruise and Bluetooth hands-free phone, 60/40 folding rear seats and much more. For relatively small steps up in price (they still have to cap out below Elantra), you can get just about any feature you seek, short of a full leather interior. Top-trim Limited even has such premium features as BlueLink connected car services and a hands-free smart trunk.

The only real tradeoff we noted across the three-trim lineup is that a manual transmission is available only on base SE trim, which is also the only trim level with rear drum brakes. We tend to think of a manual as a more sporting choice, the kind that would go best with disc brakes all around, but Hyundai knows their customer well. The buyer of a base trim Accent is interested in one thing: the lowest possible price. And the stick-shift-and-drum combo delivers this.

Hyundai Accent has proven itself to be more than an entry-level vehicle, as demonstrated by its many repeat customers. Having driven the new Accent extensively, we easily understand this. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	1.6L DOHC 16v GDI 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	130 hp / 119 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd man (base SE only)
	6-speed auto (SEL, Limited; opt SE)
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
BRAKES	F: 11-in vented disc
	R: (SE) drum; (SEL, Limited) disc
STEERING	rack & pinion pwr, motor driven
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut, coils,
	twin-tube gas shocks, 22.2mm stblzr bar
	R: coupled torsion axle, coils,
	twin-tube shocks
WHEELS/TIRES	SE: steel 5.5J15 / 185/65R15
	SEL: alloy 5.5x15 / 185/65R15
	Limited: alloy 6.5x17 / 205/45R17
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	172.6 in / 101.6 in
WIDTH / HEIGHT	68.1 in / 57.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	33.46 ft
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.1 in / 33.5 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.9 in / 37.3 in
SHOULDER ROOM (F/R)	54.2 in / 53.7 in
HIP ROOM (F/R)	51.7 in / 50.8 in
CARGO VOLUME	13.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	2502-2679 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	11.9 gal
MPG...Limited auto 28/38/32 (city/hwy/comb)	

BASE PRICES:

SE	manual	\$14,995
	automatic	\$15,995
SEL	automatic	\$17,295
Limited	automatic	\$18,895

INCLUDED ON ALL: Rear camera w dynamic guidelines, vehicle stability mgmt, ESC, traction control, 4-wheel 4-channel ABS w EBD & BA, remote keyless entry w alarm, dual power manual fold side mirrors, AC, power windows and locks, one-touch triple turn signal, 6-way adjustable driver's seat incl height, passenger seatback pocket, front/rear door map pockets, 60/40 fold-down rear seatback, cloth seating & door inserts, center stack 12v outlet, tilt steering wheel, trip computer, Bluetooth hands-free phone, steering wheel cruise controls, wheel-mounted audio & Bluetooth controls, smartphone/USB/aux inputs, 5-in color touchscreen, 4.0B audio w AM/FM/CD/MP3, 4 speakers.

ADDED ON SE AUTOMATIC: Hillstart assist control.

ADDED ON SEL & LIMITED: Driver's blind spot mirror, heated side mirrors, auto headlight control, driver's auto-up window, sliding center armrest w storage bin, chrome inside door handles, tilt/telescope wheel, exterior temp display, Bluetooth hands-free phone w voice recognition, dual USB charging, 7-in touchscreen, AM/FM/Sirius w Android/Apple, 6 speakers.

ADDED ON LIMITED: Automatic emergency braking, side mirror turn signal indicators, chrome highlighted grille slats, chrome beltline molding, chrome door handles, projector headlights w LED DRLs, LED taillights, fog lights, hands-free smart trunk, power glass one-touch tilt/slide sunroof, heated front seats, proximity key w pushbutton start, auto climate w auto defog, leather wheel & shift knob.

