

Moving up

Redefined Hyundai three-row

BY JOE SAGE

Hyundai's overall utility lineup has been evolving for several years, as have the three-row models within it. Definitions by size have blurred industrywide, with Hyundai a great example, having added the "small" Kona and non-size-specific Nexo fuel cell utility last year, with an even smaller "urban utility" Venue arriving this fall.

In the upper middle of the scale, the longstanding two-row Santa Fe became Santa Fe Sport in 2013, in time for the three-row Veracruz to be replaced by an all-new three-row Santa Fe, with styling very similar to the midsize Sport. The three-row Santa Fe was not known as full-size so much as a long-wheelbase version of Santa Fe Sport, though this always seemed open to some interpretation. For 2016, Hyundai Tucson—at that time still the smallest of a three-size set—was replaced with an all-new model also bearing the styling of the other two. Appearance was now so similar among the three, we learned to quickly spot them by whether the side glass dipped down, kicked up or met in the middle toward the rear.

In early 2018, the smaller Santa Fe Sport reverted to the plain Santa Fe name (as a 2019 model), while the three-row vehicle became Santa Fe XL. This returned continuity to the two-row midsize Santa Fe name (assuming continuity can include interruption by its time as the Santa Fe Sport). The mama-papa-baby-bear styling remained, but any potential confusion with the Santa Fe XL ("wait, I

thought *this* one was the Santa Fe") would soon be erased, as one year and one model year later, Hyundai now replaces it with the entirely new, seemingly full-size but nominally midsize, individually styled Palisade three-row SUV.

We flew (via Seattle) to Spokane, in way-eastern Washington, then shuttled to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho for a chance to meet and drive the new 2020 Hyundai Palisade in a combination of elegant exurban and rugged wilderness terrain that represent a good percentage of the full range of markets and purposes this vehicle will serve.

Here, senior chief designer Chris Chapman took us through a whiteboard process summing up clean-sheet development of the Palisade—with interlocking shapes and volumes from its "first read" DRLs up top, to the "piercing" shape developed by brushed metal trim visually connecting through sheet metal to the headlights below, creating the feel of "a predator emerging out of the water." Chapman also confirmed what we had noted—that the lineup has changed from a set of stairstep "Russian dolls" to a complex set of "chess pieces," each tailored to a different type of buyer and "infused with more personality and more ownership into what they're going to do with the vehicle." Palisade's cross-section and side profile are proportioned to break away from current trends toward high shoulders, to the power of a flexed biceps, with visual muscle planted closer to the wheels. All this potency is collected in an elegant envelope presenting a main theme Chapman describes as "the serenity of a yacht"—the principles that make a select few SUVs equally at home in the canyons and woods or at the executive

country club.

VP of product planning Mike O'Brien backs up these theories, describing the new Palisade as bold, strong and stable in appearance and content—as protective as a Western fortress for the gentle task of protecting a family. Beyond impressions, O'Brien points out that the new SUV is built with 59 percent advanced high-strength steel—40 percent more than the 42 percent in the outgoing Santa Fe XL—contributing to a primary goal of noticeably improved ride quality, achieved when flex that otherwise makes the body "part of the suspension" is dramatically reduced. A particular point of pride is that even the reinforced build of a dual-sunroof top-trim Limited has closed the gap to match the rigidity of a solid-roof structure.

Sophisticated new suspension (see sidebar) includes aluminum knuckles front and rear (reducing weight by 36 and 39 percent, respectively), combining with body structure for exceptional roll control for what is a typically tall, high-mass vehicle.

Palisade not only receives increased insulation against powertrain and road noise, but the whole sound-deadening process was integrated with structural design, rather than being assigned to an insulation team, as is more typical, after the fact.

Emphasizing again that the Palisade is conceived for that most precious of cargo, your family, O'Brien points out comprehensive crash-specific engineering from bumpers to small overlap structure, to side and roof safety cage, to front impact energy dispersion through the underbody, all aiming toward NHTSA 5-Star and IIHS TSP+ top ratings once testing is completed.

Palisade puts this all in motion with an upgrad-

ed 291-hp 3.8L gasoline direct-injection (GDI) V6 with a twist—the powertrain switches seamlessly between Atkinson and Otto Cycles to provide optimum power when needed for acceleration or quick maneuvers and top efficiency when cruising.

Palisade is available with predictive HTRAC all-wheel drive for just \$1700 additional in any of its three trim levels, featuring drive modes including eco (which can send as much as full power to the front wheels), comfort, sport (which maintains between 35-50 percent rear power) and smart (which automatically responds to your driving style in a range from eco's 100 percent front to sport's 50 percent rear traction), plus a snow mode that allows torque-controlling second gear start and pre-distributes traction (rather than responding) to restrict wheel slip upon accelerating, with additional AWD lock for the most slippery conditions.

Palisade is a healthy tow vehicle, with 5000-lb capacity and new trailer sway control to keep your two-piece rig in a straight line. Optional is a new auto-leveling rear suspension usually only found in larger and/or more expensive utilities.

Our drive in Idaho touched upon a wide range of

these conditions, from city streets and Interstate highway around Coeur d'Alene, to a full day of mountain and rolling meadow driving through central Idaho wilderness and ranches, punctuated by a rough yet reasonably high-speed 15-mile stretch of unpaved forestry roads. We experimented with all drive modes except snow, and we came surprisingly close to maybe trying that—despite being the week of summer solstice, snowstorms rolled into the higher country in the region, dumping as much as two feet in some areas.

Palisade is well wired. Bluetooth hands-free phone and wireless or aux-input audio are included across the lineup. Upper trims feature a 10.25-inch touchscreen, and top Limited trim includes 630-watt, 12-speaker Harman Kardon premium audio with QuantumLogic surround sound and ClariFi dynamic range restoration tech.

The introduction of the Hyundai Palisade brings a solid and handsome new vehicle to the world and also takes a big step toward defining the full Hyundai lineup, a broader set of visible choices sure to strengthen the brand even further, making its breadth and depth easy for everyone to see. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

SEATING CAPACITY	.....seven or eight
ENGINE	.....3.8L Lambda II, Atkinson Cycle alum block/head GDI D-CVVT 24v V6
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....13.0:1
HP/TORQUE	.....291 hp / 262 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....8-spd auto / Shiftronic®
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD / HTRAC AWD opt
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut / coils R: multi-link indep, separated springs & shocks, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....motor driven power rack & pinion, column mounted
BRAKES	.....F: 340x30mm vented, R: 305x11mm solid
WHEELS	.....18x7.5J alloy / 20x7.5J alloy opt
TIRES	.....245/60 R18 / 245/50 R20 opt
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....196.1 / 114.2 in
HEADROOM (F/2/3)	.....40.7 / 40.1 / 37.4 in (with sunroof): 39.3 / 38.8 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	.....44.1 / 42.4 / 31.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....38.3 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....7.9 in
CARGO VOLUME	.....18.0 / 45.8 / 86.4 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....4127-4387 lb
ROOF RAILS LOAD CAPACITY	.....220 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....(w trailer brakes) 5000 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	.....18.8 gal
MPG	.....FWD: 19/26/22 (city/hwy/comb) .....AWD: 19/24/21 (city/hwy/comb)

Pricing

SE	FWD	\$31,550
SEL	"	33,500
Limited	"	44,700
	AWD	+\$1700
	Dest.Chg	\$1045

