

Trim and fit.



5-passenger 2013 Santa Fe Sport



We meet the athletic new Hyundai Santa Fe Sport at altitude in Park City.

by Joe Sage

The 2013 Hyundai Santa Fe Sport is all new, but that's not all—this 5-passenger version will soon be joined by a 7-passenger Santa Fe (which in turn will knock the Veracruz out of the lineup). Change is good, they say, and the first change you'll notice is in the sheetmetal, following suit to the rest of the Hyundai lineup, which we've previously noted has become an industry worldwide style leader.

The biggest change, though, may be the effort Hyundai has put into reducing weight. This is a challenge to all automakers, as safety requirements multiply (airbags, side impact and rollover reinforcements add weight) while fuel economy goals ramp up even faster (and weight is their enemy).

A proliferation of luxury and technical features, once considered options and now competitive necessities, also add weight. Most manufacturers do all they can to add what's needed, while lightening all they can, so usually-inevitable weight gains are at least minimized.

Hyundai, though, has restyled, updated and up-featured the new Santa Fe, and improved its fuel mileage, while not only keeping weight gain under control—they are rightly proud of having achieved all that while *reducing* weight. Reducing weight is extremely difficult. As one engineer once told us, for every pound you want to lose, you have to find sixteen ways to do it—each ounce is a huge challenge. Lightweight wheels, for example, can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars more than standard. Hyundai has nonetheless managed to knock a whopping 266 pounds off the new 5-passenger Santa Fe—and the upcoming 7-passenger will be a full 397 pounds lighter than the outgoing Veracruz.

The new 5-passenger Santa Fe Sport is bigger and lighter than the new (also totally reworked) Ford Escape, and the 7-passenger Santa Fe will be hundreds of pounds lighter than not only the outgoing Veracruz, but also the new (also totally reworked) Nissan Pathfinder.

One way Hyundai chases weight is by having their own \$10 billion steel plant, where they are able to craft alloys perfectly tuned to each task. This also helps them keep their prices favorable, while build quality is the highest it has ever been.

CHALLENGING METRICS. At the launch of the new Hyundai Santa Fe, in Deer Valley, Park City and Sundance, Utah, Hyundai told us that weight issues were the "toughest metric" they had to tackle.

Another proud metric is sales, where the marketplace is responding to Hyundai's hard work. Brand sales in the US surpassed 500,000 units in 2010, 600,000 in 2011 and rose another 10 percent to top 700,000 in 2012. At this launch, they were just coming off their fifth month in a row of sales above 60,000 units. Hyundai's share of the US market now exceeds five percent. And they do it with minimal padding: their fleet mix (volume sales to rental companies and so on) is under 10 percent. Dealer inventory was at just 21 days, the quickest turnover of any non-premium brand. Excluding trucks (Hyundai doesn't build those, and it's arguably a cleaner comparison anyway, as trucks are tariff-protected), they are the fourth-best-selling retail car brand in the US, behind Toyota, Honda and Chevrolet, and ahead of Ford and Nissan—and in July they were third-best, also beating Chevy.



The 5-passenger Santa Fe Sport (at left and this page, top) is easily distinguished from the upcoming 7-passenger Santa Fe (above) by its side glass.

Hyundai is doing their bit for the US jobs market, too, as they have added a third shift at their Alabama plant.

Hyundai is philanthropic with their proceeds: for 14 years, they have been dedicated to fighting childhood cancer through the Hyundai Hope on Wheels program. By year end, they will have donated \$57 million to the fight, including establishing the Hyundai Cancer Institute at Children's Hospital of Orange County, California.

PROGRESS FOR A PIONEER. Although by now it seems as though they have been around forever, the crossover utility (CUV) was new in 2001, and the first generation Hyundai Santa Fe pioneered it (along with the Ford Escape, Mazda Tribute and, well, Pontiac Aztec). Their goal was to sell 40,000 units a year—and they promptly sold 100,000. The second generation Santa Fe was introduced in 2006 as a 2007 model.



SANTA FE SPORT 5-PSNGR

ENGINES 2.4L 4-cylinder GDI190 hp
2.0T 4-cylinder twin-scroll turbo.....264 hp
TRANSMISSION.....6-speed automatic
DRIVETRAINFront-engine, FWD or AWD
INCLUDED: Active ECO system, ESC, traction control, ABS with brake assist, seven airbags, tire pressure monitor, YES essentials, tilt/telescope wheel w/audio-cruise-phone controls, driver selectable steering, 40/20/40 rear split fold-down seat, power windows, AM-FM-SiriusXM-CD-MP3 6-speaker audio, Bluetooth, BlueLink® telematics.

PRICE: 2.4L 2.4L FWD\$24,450
2.4L AWD\$26,200
Popular equipment package.....950
Leather and premium package2,950
Technology package2,700

PRICE: 2.0T 2.0T FWD\$27,700
2.0T AWD\$29,450
Leather and premium package2,450
Technology package2,900

OPTIONS: Cargo net, wheel locks, cargo mats, mudguards, ECM/Homelink, remote start, tow hitch, bumper applique.

DESTINATION CHARGE825

MAXED-OUT SAMPLE TOTAL
2.0T AWD with all options\$37,285



Spacious and luxurious—everything you expect for \$24-29,000 or so. Actually, a lot more than you expect, as the Hyundai Santa Fe delivers the goods.

passenger space (see photos on preceding pages).

Hyundai tells us that while their lineup has been strong in the pre-family and post-family categories, these new models will strengthen their offerings in the family segment. While the subcompact Hyundai Tucson is their pre-family CUV offering, the 7-passenger Santa Fe will be their core family machine, and the 5-passenger Santa Fe Sport their “trailing family” vehicle. Hyundai’s product planners say that with most vehicles, if you see a 7-passenger vehicle you like, but don’t need it, you are out of luck. They make a point. By merging the prior Santa Fe and Veracruz offerings, they can now claim one nameplate covering a huge range of buyers.

STYLE POINTS. Perhaps it’s also due to Hyundai’s ownership of their own plant, but they certainly are ahead of the curve on shaping steel. The folds and bends and flows they achieve—a style they call “Fluidic Precision”—are being emulated by others, some at twice the price. Hyundais says its styling is becoming “more taut and more tailored,” and we’re inclined to agree, as some of the emulators go overboard in pursuit.

Interiors (under the banner “Art Meets Technology,” which sounds very close to Cadillac’s Art and Science), are top-notch. Seats are strong and comfortable, and the instrument panel is clean, attractive and highly featured, with an above-average intuitive level to controls and amenities. Instruments feature color LCD displays—three different levels from base, to 4.3-inch touchscreen with rear camera, maxing out with an 8-inch touchscreen adding nav—and interiors are available with a variety of two-tone finishes. Hyundai’s Infinity audio systems are among the best, with or without considering their incredible value in a vehicle at this price point, and the Santa Fe Sport offers 550-watt 12-speaker surround sound.

Climate control includes a clean air ionizer, vents in the B-pillar for second-row passengers and, in the upcoming 7-passenger version, separate controls and vents for the third row. The proof is in actual usage, and we found a comfortable driver- and passenger-centric ride, with ergonomic seats for all. The doors and ceiling are finished at levels well above this budget. We also enjoyed a cooled glovebox for our bottled water, enough right there to close the sale with most Arizonans.

The 40/20/40 split second row flexibly creates up to 71.5 cubic feet of cargo space behind the front row, more than Chevy Equinox or Ford Edge (and with 78.2 in the upcoming 7-passenger Santa Fe). And there is under-floor storage. All this on a tight-turning wheelbase of 106.3 inches, five or six inches shorter than Equinox and Edge.

ENGINES AND EFFICIENCY. The Hyundai Santa Fe Sport comes with either of two engines: a 190-hp 2.4-liter four-cylinder, same as in the Sonata, achieving 33 MPG highway with front-wheel drive—best of any crossover with an automatic transmission—or for more power, a 254-hp 2.0T twin-scroll turbo, which still achieves respectable fuel mileage, at 28 MPG highway with two-wheel or 27 MPG with four-wheel drive. For both power and fuel economy, these numbers beat a lot

of V6 competitors. The new 2.0T turbo is also a good bet for torque, pumping out 269 lb-ft compared to 181 for the 2.4L, though again, the 2.4L hits 33 MPG.

The 7-passenger Santa Fe will offer a 3.3-liter V6 at 294 horsepower and 252 lb-ft of torque, achieving 26 MPG highway mileage (per internal estimates so far).

ON THE HIGH ROADS OF UTAH. Our location and route were carefully chosen to show how well this all comes together when the wheel is in your hands. It’s unusual to do a vehicle launch at such an altitude—starting and finishing at 8347 feet above sea level. This also gave us a locale including beautiful two-lane mountain valley highways, dirt and gravel forest logging roads, hairpins and climbs on both, and even a little time on the Interstate. We spent the day in the 2.0T model.

We were all over the map in Summit, Wasatch and Utah Counties of northeastern Utah. The Santa Fe is not a heavy off-roader, yet the dirt and gravel forest road was a great drive—as its traction, tight turning, all-wheel control, hillstart, downhill braking and ride comfort characteristics were all enhanced by the higher degree of challenge inherent in this stretch of our route.

Front 12.6-inch and rear 11.9-inch disc brakes stop the vehicle in 134.1 feet—another best-in-class. Steering has comfort, normal and sport settings, with sport—which we used on the two-lanes—kicking in boost 15 percent later at 10 percent less force, for a more active steering feel.

Suspension includes a MacPherson strut front, and in the rear a trailing arm multi-link (geared toward cabin volume and ride comfort). Front lower arms, rear trailing arms and rear shocks all have increased-diameter bushings for solid, quiet comfort.

The Santa Fe’s all-wheel-drive unit (by Magna of Austria) is directly ahead of the rear differential, an electrohydraulic unit with multi-plate clutch that responds immediately and provides accurate torque control to all four wheels. Combined with the vehicle’s electronic stability control, you will feel less understeer and sportier, car-like handling in curves. The system also quickly senses any yaw (the skid-inducing dynamic whereby a vehicle’s front and rear start to swing side-to-side), sending stabilizing force to the outboard rear wheel.

The Santa Fe Sport did very well in all conditions—flat and straight-out, to steep and twisty. The nav system got us through a complex route in fine form. Turbo will often lag at altitude, but it had no noticeable impact on the 2.0T. At dominant Arizona elevations, all the better.

The new Santa Fe comes with a grand total of just 24 buildable combinations—with both wheelbases, seating options, three engines, front- or all-wheel drive—better for inventory and shipping logistics, as well as for keeping the customer focused and fulfilled—it makes life a lot easier for the buyer. The 2.0T Santa Fe Sport, for example, has just six buildable combinations. Major options include a Popular Equipment Package, Leather and Premium Equipment Package, and Technology Package. There are nine exterior colors and four interiors (two stain-resistant fabric and two leather).

Now that you know how easy it is to choose your specifics, you only have to decide that fundamental yes/no question. Whatever else you may be shopping for, there is no question you need to put the 2013 Hyundai Santa Fe on your short list. ■

Where the roads are dry and the cars are slick.



Arizona Driver Magazine

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