

Ahead of the curve

BY JOE SAGE

We've concluded before that Hyundai now has some of the most influential styling in the industry. It was not that way at the turn of the millennium, but the last decade or more has witnessed the company accelerating in tortoise-and-hare fashion past many a prior leader, with the brand's styling, fit and finish, and engineering massively improved—with American tastes in mind.

As only one or two others do well, Hyundai can be seen doing this in the new 2015 Genesis Sedan, in ways that, though radical, are subtle and evolutionary. It's a matter of being just ahead of the curve, or in fact creating the curve.

Audi is another one whose styling has led the curve in subtle but influential ways, while we've

credited Hyundai with influencing everyone from BMW to Ford (which draws emotional responses from BMW fans on social media). The Germans in particular comprise some rarified company for the ever-more-ragingly-successful Korean brand. But we find that Hyundai's complex and daring sheet-metal methods have become an industry leader.

It's the evolutionary approach that catches our attention in the new Hyundai Genesis Sedan. Its styling preserves the prior generation's sweeping grace, but with some smoothing of the skin, giving the car an increased level of refinement appropriate to its niche. They call it "fluidic sculpture 2.0."

A COUPLE OF DAYS at the launch of the new Genesis Sedan, held in Arizona, gave us a chance to see how well they've armed themselves for the

effort. Hyundai executives, stylists and engineers brought the new car to Paradise Valley for us to learn more about and to drive in different layouts.

Hyundai Motor America president and CEO Dave Zuchowski explained to us that with the new Genesis Sedan, they have almost completed a three-to-four-year "product cadence" that has transformed the lineup. (Later this year, we will see a Hyundai Tucson fuel cell electric—coming first to California, with its hydrogen infrastructure—and a new 2015 Sonata, a model which sold an amazing 200,000 units last year.)

Lined up for us were a variety of 2015 Genesis Sedan models and drivetrains—with three engine/drive combinations—making a dominant presence. It's a move from a traditional or even sedate model to something sporty and progressive.



THE IMPACT of all this progress has long since been felt, even before completion, with a halo effect that has worked in both directions: the huge successes from Elantra and Veloster on up have put the Hyundai badge on America's roads in record numbers, and the luxury and refinement of Equus and Genesis have reinforced the brand's strength and presence as a high-end contender. (Hyundai actually has a bigger market share in the premium segment than in all others.)

This is all more than just a marketing formula: the proof is in their customers' opinions. Hyundai is ranked number one in Total Value by Strategic Vision (2013); is ranked number one among mid-size premium cars per JD Power and Associates' Initial Quality Study (2013); is ranked number one in Customer Advocacy (as the saying goes, ask the person who owns one) by Market Probe (2013); and has been ranked number one in Customer Loyalty Engagement by Brand Keys for two consecutive years (2013 and already for 2014).

Genesis Sedan customers have a household income over 70 percent higher than the rest of their lineup, and the group is about 30 percent more college-educated. Hyundai tracks its customers effectively and has broken its first-time Genesis Sedan buyers to date into three groups. "Retention" customers are brand loyal, either coming back for another Genesis Sedan or moving up from Sonata or Azera. "Non-lux conquests" move up from such volume sellers as Camry and Accord. And the third category is where the Genesis Sedan

has been drawing customers from Lexus ES and Mercedes-Benz E-Class for some time—their "luxury conquest" customers.

Hyundai is ready to entice a lot more from this third group. E-Class and Lexus ES owners remain hot prospects, but now they have a broader list, divided into two levels. Their primary competitors are the rear-drive E-Class and Lexus GS—after all, the Genesis Sedan is a rear-drive and all-wheel-drive challenger—as well as America's hot-selling domestic premium sedan, the Cadillac CTS. Secondary targets are the Lexus ES again, while also in their sights are the BMW 5 Series and Audi A6.

Zuchowski says the car is ready to "compete in any segment against any global competitor."

ENGINEERS AND STYLISTS have given the car a longer wheelbase and have emphasized fundamental rear-drive proportions, with a short front overhang and tight body from the front wheels to the A-pillar, and a redesign from the C-pillar back, to draw the eye to where the power lies.

Of their three drivetrain models (see sidebar), we drove the all-wheel-drive V6 model and the rear-drive V8 from metro Phoenix, out US 60 east through Superior, Miami and Globe, then north to Roosevelt Lake. Here, we stopped for lunch and some specific demonstrations, such as its impressive electronic parking brake with automatic vehicle hold. From there it was north again, to join the



2015 HYUNDAI GENESIS SEDAN

HYUNDAI GENESIS 3.8 (RWD/AWD)

ENGINE.....3.8L 24v V6 DOHC w CVVT
 POWER/TORQUE311 hp / 293 lb-ft
 WHEELS/TIRES18/8.0 / P245/45R18
 BRAKES ..front: 13.6" four-piston vent disc
 rear: 12.4" one-piston solid disc
 WEIGHTRWD 4138 lb / AWD 4295 lb
 MPG RWD 18/29/22 (city/hwy/comb)
AWD 16/25/19 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE..... RWD \$38,000
AWD \$40,500

HYUNDAI GENESIS 5.0 (RWD)

ENGINE.....5.0L 32v V8 DOHC w CVVT
 POWER/TORQUE420 hp / 383 lb-ft
 (or on regular fuel).....407 hp / 372 lb-ft
 WHEELS/TIRES ..front 19x8.5 / P245/40R19
rear 19x9.0 / P275/35R19
 BRAKES ..front: 14.2" four-piston vent disc
 rear: 12.4" one-piston solid disc
 WEIGHT4541 lb
 MPG.....15/23/18 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE (RWD only) \$51,500

TRANSMISSION8-speed automatic with SHIFTRONIC and paddle shifters
STEERINGrack-mounted electric, variable
SUSPENSION.....front/rear: independent 5-link, high-performance gas shocks, coil springs and solid stabilizer bar. **OPTIONAL (5.0L):** continuous damping suspension
WHEELBASE.....118.5 in
LENGTH OVERALL196.5 in
FUEL CAPACITY20.3 gal

WARRANTIES:

NEW VEHICLE5 years / 60,000 miles
POWERTRAIN10 years / 100,000 miles
ANTI-PERFORATION7 years / unlimited mi
ROADSIDE ASSIST5 years / unlimited mi

INCLUDED:

(Note: some features are included on 5.0 V8 only; see V6 options on our test cars, next page, for examples.) Stability management, Intelligent Drive Mode select, HID auto headlights, DRLs, LED accents, LED fog lights, high beam assist, rain-sensing wipers and windshield auto-defogger, power tilt/slide panoramic sunroof, power fold auto-dim side mirrors with puddle lamps, auto-dim rearview mirror, ultra leather seating surfaces, heated and ventilated seats, 12-way power front seats with power lumbar, driver seat power bolster, leather-wrapped power tilt/telescope haptic control steering wheel, front/rear parking assist, electronic parking brake, power rear sunshade, manual rear side sunshades, nav system with 8" display, rear camera, parking guidelines, 7" TFT LCD multi-info display, electroluminescent gauges, smart cruise with start/stop, Bluetooth phone, audio streaming, Blue Link® infotainment with Google access, AM-FM-SiriusXM-CD-MP3-HD Lexicon 14-speaker audio, genuine wood trim, aluminum trim, carpeted mats, cargo net, hands-free smart trunk open.

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Beeline Highway, AZ 87, back down into the Valley. This is a great route for this mighty premium sedan—with winding, climbing high-speed roads and broad flat-out stretches.

And this is where we feel it: the 2015 Hyundai Genesis Sedan has increased its rigidity by 45 percent, through use of advanced structural adhesives applied even before welding. Chassis rigidity on the Genesis Sedan exceeds that even of its competitive BMW.

Any longitudinal engine—which leaves considerable space in the area between the front bumper and wheels on either side, compared with a transverse engine—is particularly challenging in federal crash testing. The Genesis Sedan has already been built with the structural strength in front to withstand new standards, as they are raised from a 40 percent to just a 25 percent offset in frontal crash testing. Ahead of the curve.

Eco, Normal and Sport Intelligent Drive Modes change gearing in both cars, and in the 5.0L V8 also change settings in its optional continuous damping suspension system. We didn't hypermile in Eco mode on our open highway testing, but it will be effective in your daily commute, as borne out in other Hyundai models we've driven. The Normal mode is plenty satisfying, but we tended to stick with Sport, in the spirit of our route.

The electric steering system takes an uncommon approach—a rack-mounted unit, more responsive than typical column-mounted units. Better than many competitors, it felt to us like the best of conventional mechanical rack-and-pinion.

AS WITH the flagship Hyundai Equus, the company is creating a new dealer experience for Genesis Sedan shoppers, too—a “showroom within a showroom,” dedicated to the model and conceived to additionally elevate the brand.

If you're deciding among all three models—V6 in RWD or AWD, V8 in RWD—the choice is typically complex. Your tradeoffs appear readily in MPG and price (see specs in sidebar). Since AWD is not available with the V8, we tend to simplify this to a two-car faceoff: the extra power and rear-grip presence of the 5.0L V8 in RWD versus the all-wheel-drive capability of the 3.8L V6 in AWD.

If you're comparing with any number of midsize premium rear-drive sedans, the power and price of the RWD V8 are very competitive, and we love the car's performance and presence. If you're comparing with all-wheel-drive champs in this segment, the AWD V6 is runaway competitive by price, and neither its performance nor presence were particularly diminished by lack of a V8, in our fairly lengthy and aggressive drive. (And when comparing with anything at all, don't forget the incredible Hyundai warranties—see specs, sidebar.)



The RWD V6 is also a contender, but for \$2500 more, and only a 157-pound weight gain, we'd opt for the Genesis Sedan AWD 3.8. The only thing that nags at us then is that the fuel economy for the RWD 5.0 nearly matches the V6 in its AWD configuration, so for those who don't care about AWD, it's just a matter of the \$11,000 difference.

“Brand is a substitute for knowledge,” we were once told. If you haven't explored Hyundai yet, this is a great place to start. As CEO Zuchowski said, they are “looking for people who are making the right decisions for the right reasons.” This is an exceptional car, on a par with any of the competition. It's extremely well built, well appointed and a solid road performer. Its specs and inclusions far exceed most competitors, for the price point in particular. Even some fairly spectacular options on our AWD 3.8 were very reasonably priced. (Options on our V6 bring it up to V8 pricing, but this is how you almost match the top model, without the V8 but with AWD.) Whether you opt for V6, V8 or AWD, you really can't lose. ■



OUR LAUNCH DRIVE CARS

HYUNDAI GENESIS 3.8 AWD

BASE PRICE (AWD) \$40,500

SIGNATURE PACKAGE: Power tilt/slide panoramic sunroof, memory/ventilated front seats, power tilt/tele wheel, HID headlights, auto-dim mirrors, blind spot / rear cross traffic detect, power rear / manual rear side sunshades.....4000

TECH PACKAGE: Ultra leather seats, 7" TFT LCD display, power driver seat cushion extend/bolster, lane departure, lane keep, smart cruise w start/stop, haptic steering wheel, pre-safety seatbelt, auto emergency braking, high beam assist, electronic parking brake w vehicle hold, front/rear parking assist.....3500

ULTIMATE PACKAGE: Wood and aluminum trim, heads-up display, power trunk, premium DIS nav with 9.2" high-def display, Lexicon 17-speaker discrete Logic 7 audio, dual-mode vent w CO2 sensor3500

DESTINATION950

TOTAL PRICE \$52,450

HYUNDAI GENESIS 5.0 RWD

BASE PRICE \$51,500

ULTIMATE PACKAGE: Heads-up display, premium DIS navigation with 9.2" high definition display, Lexicon 17-speaker discrete Logic 7 audio, continuous damping suspension, power trunk, dual-mode vent w CO2 sensor3250

DESTINATION950

TOTAL PRICE \$55,700