

Not a pickup

YET INEVITABLY COMPARED WITH 'EM

BY JOE SAGE

We had some indication that Hyundai would have a special treat for us during the recent Arizona-based launch of the new Hyundai Tucson. And, if so, we had some hopes it might be the long-awaited Hyundai Santa Cruz. On the evening following our drive of the Tucson, we were invited into a darkened room—no cameras—for a surprise. They did not disappoint, nor did the vehicle—after several years of our having a sizable crush on early sketches and executions, the final product is true to the concept and then some.

Built upon the same basis as the Tucson, Santa Cruz styling largely follows suit and speaks for itself. Most interesting, perhaps, is its format. As the pickup truck market overall and the midsize pickup market in particular see tremendous growth not only in sales, but in contenders, Hyundai has produced something decidedly different. To avoid being compared with Honda Ridgeline, itself a unibody (rather than cab-and-bed-on-frame) build that has openly tackled the pickup truck market, Hyundai Santa Cruz is actively pitched as “an entirely new category,” the Sport Adventure Vehicle. Don’t even waste time talking homebuilding, hay bales or horses—Santa Cruz is aimed at a market that is equal parts modern urbanite and active outdoor enthusiast. Get off work, go have fun, and if your fun gets muddy, dirty or wet, just toss it in the back.

This gets right to the point for a wide range of potential buyers, and the fact

that this machine is drop-dead gorgeous and well engineered can only help. Having made clear that this is not a pickup, Hyundai then does compare it with the trucks. And why not? Many shoppers inevitably will—and anyway, what else are they going to compare it with? It’s pretty much a standalone.

For starters, it’s not a midsize—it’s a compact, built on the same bones as the Hyundai Tucson (see preceding feature). Its smaller size is a bragging point, as they compare fundamental dimensions with midsize pickups (chart below). One place the Santa Cruz is “big for its size” is its wide shoulders and track—beefed up from the Tucson, not just for looks but for function, atop standard 20-inch or optional taller sidewall 18-inchers, either for varying degrees of off-road prowess. Santa Cruz’s turning circle of 40 feet curb-to-curb is the tightest in this category (the group they don’t officially inhabit), though Tacoma is very close—but Santa Cruz’s notably short overhangs give it a huge urban and wilderness tight handling advantage in wall-to-wall turning circle.

Santa Cruz styling echoes Tucson (or vice versa), with similar origami-geo-desic sheet metal in some spots, headlights that vanish into the grille pattern when off, and so on. But it enters the world as very much its own new thing. ■

(inches)	SANTA CRUZ	TACOMA	RIDGELINE	FRONTIER
LENGTH	195.7	212.2	210.0	205.5
WIDTH	75.0	75.2	78.5	72.8
HEIGHT	66.7	70.7	70.3	70.1
WHEELBASE	118.3	127.4	125.2	126.0
BED LENGTH	(upper/lower) 48.4/52.1	60.4	63.6	59.4
FOOTPRINT (sq.ft)	101.9	109.7	114.6	103.9

