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Comfortable and Practical

Hyundai Elantra Offers Smooth Ride, Value-Oriented Pricing

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In a relatively short period of time, the Hyundai Elantra has risen from a cheaply built economy car to one of the most refined in its competitive class.

In fact, if you drive it back-to-back with its American and Japanese rivals, it's hard to find any of the glaring shortfalls that were so obvious in its ancestors. The materials and design feel surprisingly nice for its low price, starting at \$16,950, and its driving feel is perfectly pleasant.

The Elantra's suspension favors comfort over handling. This isn't a car that begs to be pushed hard through corners, preferring to float in a straight line down the boulevards and highways, making it an ideal machine for commuters but not necessarily enthusiasts.

Where this car excels is in value and versatility.

On the value front, it's priced aggressively to offer a lot of content per dollar at the top,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HYUNDAI ELANTRA

The Hyundai Elantra is focused on delivering a strong value and comfortable ride. This generation is in its second year on sale after a complete redesign in 2017.

middle and bottom of its trim levels. After being fully redesigned as a 2017 model, the 2018 Elantra reshuffles its lineup to drive home the value equation even more forcefully.

New this year is the SEL trim, meant to be the high-volume version with the features most buyers are looking for. Priced at

\$18,850, the SEL comes with blind spot detection and rear cross traffic alert, a 7-inch digital display for the audio system, Android Auto, Apple CarPlay, 16-inch wheels, automatic headlights and a 3.5-inch digital driver information display behind the steering wheel.

That's just one of six trim levels, though, ranging from the base SE to the leather-clad Limited at \$22,100. There's also a more powerful, edgier feeling Sport model with a 201-horsepower, turbocharged engine priced at \$21,800.

As if that's not enough choices, Hyundai offers the Elantra GT hatchback that's lower, wider and more European-inspired.

While its measurements make it technically a midsize car according to the federal government, the Elantra sedan feels more like a competitor of the Chevrolet Cruze and Ford Focus. It aims for affordability and efficiency, including a 38-mpg rating for highway driving.

A 2.0-liter, four-cylinder engine makes 147 horsepower,

which is adequate for highway on-ramps with the early and aggressive application of the gas pedal. It's helped by a six-speed automatic transmission that — unlike some of its competitors with dreadful continuously variable transmissions — actually feels crisp and mechanically connected to the front wheels.

While the back seat can feel cozy for adults, the front buckets offer generous elbow, knee and hip room. Wide expanses of glass add to the airy feeling in front.

Swept headlights, an oversize grille and interesting hood creases keep the current generation Elantra looking fresh in its second year on the market. It doesn't scream for attention, even with deep blue or red paint, opting for an overall look that's inoffensive with just a hint of sportiness.

I also like all the thoughtfully designed, practical features in this car. Its trunk offers a roomy-for-its-class 14.1 cubic feet of volume with a low liftover height and

wide opening, something a lot of sedans get wrong. The split folding rear seat helps when you need to haul bigger cargo, although hatchbacks or small crossovers still offer more stuff-carrying potential than a sedan.

For drivers who want something efficient and affordable, but still place a premium on comfort — not necessarily handling and sportiness — the Elantra is one of the best options on the market today.

What was tested?

2018 Hyundai Elantra SEL (\$18,850). Options: Carpeted floor mats (\$125). Price as tested (including \$885 destination charge): \$19,860

Wheelbase: 106.3 in.

Length: 179.9 in.

Width: 70.9 in.

Height: 56.5 in.

Engine: 2.0-liter four cylinder (147 hp, 132 lb.-ft.)

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Fuel economy: 29 city, 38 highway

RATINGS

Style: 9

Performance: 9

Price: 8

Handling: 5

Ride: 6

Comfort: 6

Quality: 7

Overall: 7

Why buy it?

It's an all-around solid, efficient sedan that's perfect for commuting. Its ride is smoother and quieter than many competitors.



A roomy front seat and stylish, practical cabin make the Elantra stand out.