

Shifting Gears

[Hyundai Santa Fe: The Ambitious Crossover from Korea](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

Those of us who grew up during the dawn of the space age heard a common aphorism from parents, teachers and radio disc jockeys: “Always shoot for the moon, ‘cause even if you miss, you’ll be among the stars.”

It’s a phrase that hadn’t come to mind in decades, until I got behind the wheel of the Hyundai Santa Fe Sport. When the Korean car manufacturers first ventured to America, its rickety, low powered cars were the regular butt of jokes on late night television. But instead of feeling cowed and leaving, Hyundai decided to shoot for the moon. They took aim at the most popular cars made by Toyota and Lexus, and then decided to compete in terms of style, quality, and price.

Their Sonata sedan, while not significantly denting the sales of the Toyota Camry or Honda Accord, was so stylistically stunning that a year-old Sonata was worth more than a new one. Its sporty Genesis Coup takes off faster than a Porsche Panamera and its luxury liner, the Equus, comes pretty close to a fully stocked Mercedes Benz E-class. It is unlikely that folks who can casually afford a new Porsche or Benz will take a test drive in a Hyundai – even if it does mean saving \$20,000. But the quality, performance, and most importantly, the price differential are important to many buyers looking to move up from the entry level, compact

car class.



Which brings us back to the Santa Fe. It is definitely *not* a Lexus RX, which is essentially a sports car in an SUV shell. But if you aren't in the market for an SUV you can take to the drag races, then the Santa Fe is likely to earn high marks for style, comfort, and price. At \$33,000, the Santa Fe costs a bit less than fully loaded sedans like the Camry, Accord or Ford Fusion.

This is a five-passenger, mid-sized SUV intended to haul adults in comfort or a sizable amount of cargo. Outside, the Santa Fe has the sleek, teardrop shape associated with upscale SUVs. Its contours are broken by the soft, wavy lines that have come to be associated with Hyundai styling – a blend of delicate Asian tracery and the wavy lines in Southern California beach sand. Under its long, sloping hood is a 2.0-liter, four-cylinder, turbocharged engine producing 264 horsepower and 269 pound-feet of torque. The surprisingly powerful little engine won't take you to races, but it is more than enough to keep the Santa Fe near the front of the commuting pack.

Hyundai put a lot of thought into the interior design of the Santa Fe. That's not surprising since first they took aim at the Lexus RX series and then sought to replicate the experience at a lower price. The dash in the Santa Fe is designed in the shape of a reflex bow, with distinct, curved compartments for each front occupant and a protruding information cluster in the middle. The passenger side is wide and clean, as if it was the observation chair on a boat. The driver's side has large, bulging instrument clusters that are easy on the eyes.



The center section has the CD player, satellite radio, climate and Bluetooth connections. The test car had a four-inch screen which served the backup camera. There was

no navigation system, but Hyundai's satellite-based BlueLink system allows you to download turn-by-turn directions which are dictated through the car's sound system as you travel. It is similar to the OnStar direction system in General Motors cars. But for those who like a larger screen and a real map, a more traditional navigation system is available for about \$1,200.

Underneath the dash is a small storage bin which can hold a pocketbook and also houses two power outlets the USB, iPod, and MP3 ports. The Santa Fe also comes with an Apple iPhone which you can pay to fully activate, or have it for limited use of the company's BlueLink. The phone's Hyundai app lets you start your car, turn on the lights, heat, and radio remotely.

In this SUV, both the front and rear seats can be heated and are mobile. The front seats are powered with adjustable lumbar supports. The rear seats are manually operated, but can slide forward or back to modify the leg room or the cargo area. These can lay back for a fairly comfortable nap, and are in a three part split.

For those who do not want a minivan, Hyundai has a modified version of the Santa Fe with three rows of seating. That last row is located in the cargo area, which is a standard configuration for seven-passenger SUVs. It provides the ability to haul more people in a vehicle which handles like a car rather than a truck. With a stretch SUV you sacrifice storage capability – you can carry a lot of people, or a lot of stuff, but not both.

Hyundai's Santa Fe Sport, on the other hand, is a competitive and well laid out, crossover SUV. It is not really going to threaten Lexus in the marketplace, but it will give a lot of crossovers a run for their money.



2013 Hyundai Sante Fe Sport

MSRP:

\$33,025

EPA Mileage: **19 MPG City** **24 MPG Highway**

Towing Capacity: **3,500 Pounds**

Performance /Safety:

2.0-Liter turbocharged, DOHC, 4-cylinder, aluminum engine producing 264 horsepower and 269 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual mode; All Wheel Drive; 19-inch alloy wheels; MacPherson strut, twin-tube gas damper front suspension; multi-link rear suspension with stabilizer bar; ventilated front disc brakes; solid single piston rear disc brakes; traction and stability control; fog lights; backup camera; downhill brake control; front, driver's knee, side impact and curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio; CD player; iPod, MP3, USB ports; Bluetooth; Hyundai BlueLink; rearview camera with 4.2-inch screen; powered, heated, leather front and rear seats; fold flat rear seats with 40/20/40 split;