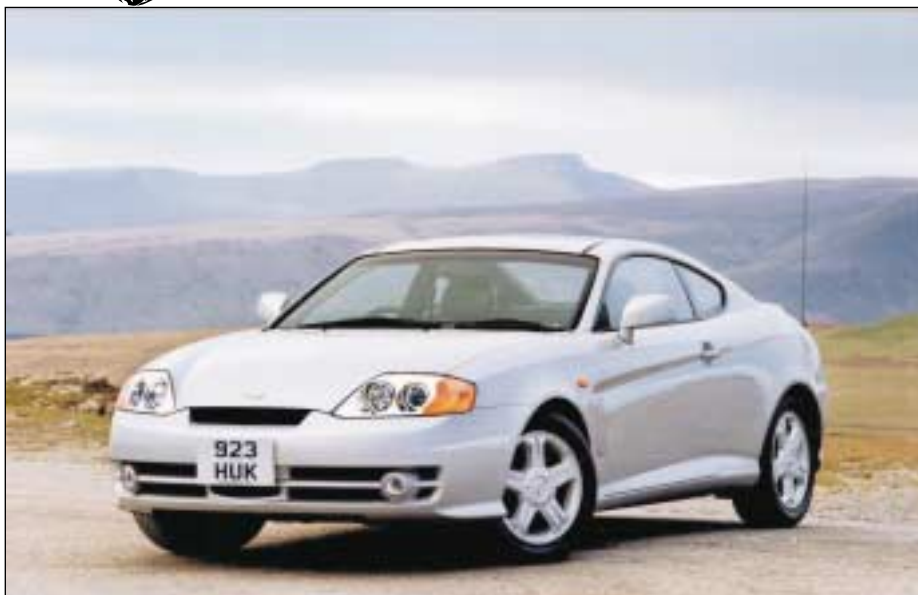


FIRST
DRIVE

Hyundai Coupé

Featured model: 2.7 V6



THIS IS THE THIRD VERSION OF Hyundai's (now) Elantra-based swoopy Coupé. And, after two previous attempts, it is – to many eyes – the most attractive, thanks perhaps to a bit of crafty “borrowing” of some successful styling cues.

As before, 1.6- and 2.0-litre engines are on offer, but so too, for the first time, is the muscular 2.7 V6 that's also available in Santa Fe and Trajet. It's a very refined and tractable engine that gives this slippery speedster smooth, vigorous acceleration that's delivered with a melodious thrum from under the bonnet.

It's a masterful car on motorways, as well, cruising at a deceptive lick in the highish top gear of the standard six-speed 'box. Pity the gears don't engage more sweetly, though – the lever's a bit notchy.

Hyundai has made a first-class job of fine-tuning the chassis, which results in fine handling. With alert turn-in and a lot of grip in reserve, the surefooted Coupé can be cornered with great verve and reassurance, while the nicely weighted steering gives smooth, prompt response through winding bends. The brakes feel really good, too – if a shade over-light.

The snag is that the ultra low-profile tyres do the ride no favours – there are firm thuds and thumps over rutted roads at low speed. Quicken the pace, though, and the ride is much more acceptable – taut, well-damped and nicely in keeping with the Coupés character.

It's pretty gloomy inside the high-silled, black leather-swathed interior, but the

design and quality of the fascia are much improved. The pedals, footrest and switches are convenient, and smart dials are visible through the height-only adjustable wheel. The hi-fi buttons are tiny, however. There's lumbar adjustment and cushion tilt for the driver's shapely and comfortable seat, but headroom is denied to six-footers because of the electric sunroof. Although big mirrors aid the rearward view, rear three-quarter vision is poor at angled road junctions.

Only the front passenger's seat both tilts and slides to give reasonable entry space to the two back seats for which only youngsters need apply; although longer and wider than previously, the Coupé remains strictly a 2+2. Similarly the fair-sized boot won't take luggage for four people, but it's fine for a touring twosome, who can fold the rear backrests forwards to give a lot of extra load space.

VERDICT

Hyundai has sunk a lot of money into the Coupé and it shows. Build quality and materials are greatly improved and that lovely V6 motor has transformed the model's performance and refinement. In only a relatively short time it has matured into a classy and sophisticated sporting machine that not only looks the part but comes at an affordable price. With this winning combination, Hyundai has now been promoted to the first division.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

THE COUPE RANGE

size and type 2+2 sports coupé (mid-priced)

trim levels S (1.6), SE (2.0), 2.7 V6

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/103bhp, 4/2.0/136, V6/2.7/165; diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 1.6/2.0: 5-speed manual, 2.7 V6: 6-speed manual

(4-speed H-matic auto optional on 2.0 and 2.7 V6)

notable features cruise control, traction control, climate control, speed-sensitive wipers, electro-chromic mirror, multi-gauge auxiliary instrument panel, leather trim

BRIEF SPECIFICATION

engine 2656cc, V6 petrol, 24 valves 165bhp/182 lb ft with all-alloy

construction; 55-litre fuel tank

drive 6-speed manual, 4-speed H-matic auto optional; front-wheel drive

suspension front: independent

MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, lower links, anti-roll bar

Rear: dual links with coil springs, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar

tyres 215/45ZR17 on 7in alloy wheels

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with anti-lock (ABS) and brake force distribution (EBD) controls

0-62mph* 8.2 sec

max speed* 136mph **maker's figures*

official (combined) mpg 27.2

LIKES ...

gas struts hold bonnet open
intermittent wipe front and rear
loads of equipment (even on 1.6S)
price (with 3yr/unl mileage warranty)
two trip odometers

and GRIPES

gimmicky torque, mpg and volts gauges
temporary spare wheel
slight orange peel effect on paintwork
high support lessens as seat rises
no roof grab handles (no room!)