Hyundai Elantra

Featured model: 1.6 GSi 5-door

JUST AS OIL OF ULAY, TREETS and Jif have been renamed to reflect their new international branding, so the Hyundai Lantra has been rebadged Elantra.

No longer a "sector-straddler", the latest, more-Europeanised model is a true upper-medium that's longer, wider and higher than before. This hatchback option is offered for the first time, too, but incongruously the estate has been dropped.

The newcomer isn't all new, though, because the engines and suspension are developed from the Lantra's; otherwise it's all change. This includes the higher quality, if somewhat cheerless, air-conditioned interior. Although no Mondeo when it comes to providing back seat knee and legroom, the Elantra is in acceptably roomy Vectra/406/Avensis territory. It's a pity that the firm and shapeless back seat isn't more cosily enveloping, though.

This smaller of the two engines suffers from low-rev languour that can be dispelled with a downshift (or two) on the excellent gearchange. By 3500rpm it gets the message and begins to look lively, revving willingly if not altogether sweetly to the 6500 red line. Alternatively, it's a flexible friend in top gear if you're not in a hurry.

The revised suspension is a little fidgety on broken surfaces, but otherwise gives a rather pleasant, unruffled ride, while the steering (though on the low-geared side) has a smooth, fluid feel. If it were "quicker" the handling would be sharper, but even as things are, the Elantra is tenaciously grippy and predictable through tight bends. The all-disc brakes are impressive, too.

Up front, the driver faces clear dials set in a sea of mid-grey plastic, but at least the moulded panels and lids are well finished and fit snugly. Steering and seat height (plus lumbar suport) adjustments give a tailored driving position with most – though not all – of the switches conveniently positioned. Fortunately the three rear head restraints intrude only a little on rearward vision.

Even the mid-range GSi is remarkably well equipped, with items including four electric windows, four airbags, alarm and immobiliser, remote central locking, air conditioning, anti-lock brakes, front foglamps…

Despite intruding suspension turrets, the hatchback's boot is bigger than average, but there's a prominent (18cm) rear sill to cope with. The load area is greatly increased by folding the rear cushions and backrests to form a long, flat load deck.

VERDICT

What a difference an E makes! – the Elantra is a much better car than its previous near-namesake. But by moving up in the world, it's now hobnobbing with a better class of, albeit costlier, rival, many of whose number boast greater mechanical refinement. A fine effort, nevertheless, and well worth considering, especially if value for money is a priority. And if the Lantra is anything to go by, it's unlikely to prove too painful in depreciation, either.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	✪✪○○○
Space/practicality	✪✪✪✪○
Controls/displays	✪✪✪○○
Safety	✪✪✪○○
Handling/steering	✪✪✪○○
Comfort	✪✪○○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1599cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 106bhp at 5800rpm, 106 lb ft at 3000rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.6 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.4 in 4th
suspension front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar. Rear: independent coil spring/damper struts with transverse and trailing link location, anti-roll bar
steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.4m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.2m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with standard electronic anti-skid (ABS) and brake force distribution (EBD) controls
wheels/tyres 5½in steel with 185/65R15H tyres (Kumho Powermax 769 on test car); full-size spare

LIKES ...

new, improved fit and finish
generous inventory of equipment
handy drink holders, cubbies, map nets
airbag passenger-presence detector
red lights on opened front doors

and GRIPES

radio/CD only – no cassette player
small trip meter hard to decipher
electric blue instrument lighting
radio and clock too bright at night
facia air vents lack full adjustment

THE ELANTRA RANGE

size and type upper medium (budget-priced) four-door saloon and five-door hatchback
trim levels 1.6: Si, GSi; 2.0: CDX
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/106bhp 4/2.0/139; diesel: due spring 2002
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 4-speed stepped automatic optional

more facts and figures ⇨

OVERTAKING ABILITY ✪✪○○○

Keep the engine above 3500 revs and it's a willing worker; below this, response for overtaking or on hills is doleful. It's tractable in top, though. Although game to rev to a vocal 6500, there's no point

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④th gear	⑤th gear
20-40mph	3.7	10.5	15.5
30-50mph	4.6	10.0	14.9
40-60mph	5.9	10.3	14.7
50-70mph	7.6	11.0	15.8
30-70mph	**12.2**	**21.0**	**30.7**

max speed in each gear *(*using 6200rpm for best acceleration)*

gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	30	53	77	101	115

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ✪✪✪✪○

Interior space well apportioned to give plenty of rear legroom, together with a generously sized boot/load deck; high sill, though. Rear doors provide good foot entry space, but sill protection absent

in centimetres (5-door hatch)

outside	
length	449
width - *inc mirrors*	196
- *mirrors folded*	172
height *(no roof bars)*	142
load sill height *(inside/outside)*	18/65
steering	
turns lock-to-lock	3.2
turning circle *(metres)*	10.4
easy to park/garage?	✪✪✪✪○

inside († *with sunroof*)	
front - legroom	91-108
- headroom	90-94†
rear - typical leg/kneeroom	100/74
- headroom	92
- hiproom	129
load space *(all seats in use)*	
(litres/cu ft)	520/18.4
load length	87-160
full length to facia	No
load width	99-144
load height (*to shelf/ to top of aperture*)	48/80

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ✪✪✪○○

Plenty of seat adjustments, but fiddly radio controls, separate rear wash/wipe switch and some tiny warning lights mar what is otherwise a commendable cockpit. Medium clutch and excellent gearchange

SAFETY ✪✪✪○○

No Euro-NCAP data yet, but Elantra did well in US tests. Consistent and reassuring brakes with ABS and EBD. Front side airbags standard, as are alarm and immobiliser. Three-point rear centre seatbelt provided

braking

pedal feel	✪✪✪✪○
in emergency	✪✪✪○○
handbrake	✪✪✪✪○

dry road stopping distance
from 50mph (with standard ABS)

pedal load	distance
10kg	37m
21kg	**26m *best stop***
+4kg ie 25kg	27m *ABS on*

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS

Elantra not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES

central locking	✓	deadlocks	×
remote control	✓	alarm	✓
auto window closure	×	immobiliser	✓
		luggage security	

✓ *standard* 0 *factory option* × not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ✪✪✪○○

Predictable handling, reassuring cornering (Kumho tyres grip well) and controlled roll. Nicely weighted, flowing steering, too, but feels rather low geared when pressing on. Good turning circle

COMFORT ✪✪○○○

Ride not super-supple but deals with most faults admirably. Back seat rather firm and erect for sybarites, but certainly roomy. Unstressed cruising at 70mph. Air conditioning and electric sunroof standard

FUEL ECONOMY ✪✪✪○○

Keeping the revs up (often necessary to make progress) does fuel economy no favours, but 40-plus mpg possible with restraint. The easy filling tank gives respectable range between forecourt visits

AA test results *(mpg)*	
worst (hard/urban)	24
best (gentle/rural)	42
overall mpg on test	**36**
realistic tank capacity	47 litres
typical range	370 miles

official figures *(mpg)*	
urban	30.1
extra urban	45.6
combined	**38.2**
CO_2 emissions	176g/km
car tax band	C

HOW THE ELANTRA COMPARES

	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from * 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/(p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
HYUNDAI ELANTRA 1.6	**4/1599/106**	**3390**	**12.2**	**30.7/21.0**	**36**	**26/21**	**108**	**100/74**	**3.2/10.4**	**449**
Daewoo Nubira 1.6†	4/1598/105	3390	11.6	29.2/20.7	32	27½/19	107	96/76	3.1/10.7	451
Honda Civic 1.6	4/1590/110	3550	10.5	24.5/17.8	42½	26½/16	107	102/76	2.8/11.6	429
Renault Laguna II 1.8 16v	4/1783/123	3370	11.2	26.1/19.0	37	25/12	110	97/71	3.2/10.9	458
Skoda Octavia 1.6*	4/1595/101	3510	11.3	24.8/18.1	35½	24/27	112	97/69	3.1/10.5	451
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8	4/1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38½	24/18	111	101/73	3.0/10.9	450

† *figures for estate car* * *1998 version* * *all with ABS* (p) *all power assisted*

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