

FIRST
DRIVE

Hyundai Elantra

Featured model: 2.0CDX



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", this latest, more European model is a true upper-medium; it's longer, wider and higher than previously. It's all new, too, and includes a hatchback option for the first time, yet incongruously the estate has been dropped. Actually it isn't *completely* new, because the 1.6 and two-litre engines, as well as the suspension, are developed from the Lantra's; otherwise it's all change.

This includes the much improved leather-trimmed (CDX), air-conditioned interior. Although no Mondeo when it comes to back seat legroom, the Elantra is almost in acceptably roomy Vectra/406/Primera territory. Headroom is below par, however.

Hyundai claims 0-62mph in 9.1 sec for the two-litre, but although lively, our low-mileage car didn't feel quite that eager. It's no long-legged cruiser, either, but it revs smoothly and doesn't sound stressed at motorway speeds. It's also quite tolerant of pottering round the lanes, showing no objection to pulling from about 1200rpm.

The 106bhp 1.6 has a crisper-sounding edge to it. Although it's a couple of seconds slower to 62mph, it's a willing performer if you're prepared to rev it. Both models have a slick gearchange.

Improvements in engine refinement are matched by the revised suspension. It smooths out road faults very well to give a nicely absorbent ride, while the well-weighted steering is smooth and

responsive, and has had the previous torque steer tuned out. Tyre noise is low.

Up front, the driver is confronted by glossy, fake wood facia trim set in a sea of dove grey plastic, but the moulded panels and lids are well finished and fit properly. Steering and seat height (plus lumbar support) adjustments and intelligently placed switches make life comfortable for the driver. Pity that the back seat head restraints and tailgate spoiler mar rearward vision to some extent, though.

Satellite navigation is the only obvious item missing from what is a remarkably long list of standard equipment – a brochure browse will reveal all. Safety features haven't been overlooked, either, and include anti-lock brakes, traction control, three "proper" rear seatbelts and side airbags at the front.

Despite intruding wheelarches, the hatchback's boot is bigger than average and the load area can be greatly increased by folding the 60/40 split rear cushions and backrests to form a long, flat floor.

VERDICT

Improvements in virtually all areas mean that the Elantra is a much better car than its predecessor. The snag is, though, that by moving up in the world, it's now hobnobbing with a better class of rival. It's a good effort, nevertheless, and gives the name Hyundai greater credence. Where the Elantra scores a bull's-eye is in its value for money – only the Skoda Octavia runs it close.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

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 summer 2001

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; 4-speed stepped automatic (with torque converter) optional on 2.0CDX

notable features Si: ABS/EBD, airbag passenger detector, side airbags, air conditioning, remote control central locking. GSi adds: trip computer, alarm, sunroof. CDX adds: traction control, leather, alloy wheels, cruise control

LIKES ...

generous inventory of equipment
airbag passenger presence detector
new, improved fit and finish
leather that smells like leather
side airbags standard across range

and GRIPEs

small trip meter hard to decipher
electric blue instrument lighting
gearchange elbow fouls central box lid
rear backrest release knobs stiff
fiddly radio/cassette controls

VITAL STATISTICS (cm) 5-DOOR

length x width (exc mirrors)	449x172
front- legroom	85-108
- headroom (with sunroof)	90-93
rear- typical legroom	99
- typical kneeroom	72
- headroom	90
- hiproom	129
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	465/16.4
load length (seats up/folded)	89/176
load width	100/142
load sill height (inside/outside)	17/65
boot/load aperture height	49/81