New Elantra: Fuel-Sipping In Luxury

Ann M. Job, For The Associated Press

The new-for-2013 Hyundai Elantra GT hatchback is a stylish, fuel-sipping, nimble car with surprisingly quiet interior and luxury touches that include a huge panoramic sunroof and a sliding center armrest.

Despite the name, though, this new Hyundai is not that much of a GT, or Grand Tourer, in performance.

In fact, the Elantra GT has the same 148-horsepower, naturally aspirated, four-cylinder engine that's in the 2013 Elantra sedan.

This powerplant helps account for the Elantra GT's notable federal government fuel economy rating of 28 miles per gallon in city driving and 39 mpg on the highway for an automatic transmission model. These numbers are near the top mileage ratings among gasoline-only-powered, five-door hatchbacks.

Best of all, the new Elantra GT, like all Hyundais, comes with a 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty and a limited, bumper-to-bumper warranty for 5 years/60,000 miles.

Hatchbacks typically are priced higher than their sedan siblings, and the Elantra GT five-door is no exception.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, for a 2013 Elantra GT is $19,170 with six-speed manual transmission and $20,170 with six-speed automatic.

This compares with $17,590 for a base, 2013 Elantra sedan with manual transmission and the $18,590 starting retail price for a base, 2013 Elantra sedan with automatic.

Still, the Elantra GT has starting retail prices that are lower than major hatchback competitors'.

For example, the 2013 Ford Focus starts at $19,995 with five-speed manual transmission and $21,090 with six-speed automatic, while the 2013 Volkswagen Golf starts at $20,590 for a five-door model with six-speed automatic transmission.

Arguably, all hatchbacks have a flowing side profile. But the Elantra GT's sweeping lines emanate from the same Hyundai Fluidic Sculpture design that made the Hyundai Sonata a U.S. sales winner.

Also, the Elantra GT was designed for Europe, so some people see it as a European-looking car.

Driving the Elantra GT test car was pleasant, with the car unusually quiet at startup and while resting at stop lights, even though the engine stayed on the whole time.

The driver didn't even feel vibration coming through the gear shift lever at idle, and noise from surrounding cars was muted.

Power delivery was steady and acceptable, as the automatic transmission moved from gear to gear with a smoothness expected in higher-priced cars.

But pedal-to-the-metal acceleration in the Elantra GT carrying four adults brought some strenuous, buzzy sounds from the 1.8-liter, double overhead cam four cylinder.

Torque peaks at 131 foot-pounds at a high 4,700 rpm, so there's not real strong "oomph" of power in many situations.

Both the Focus — with 160-horsepower four cylinder delivering 146 foot-pounds of torque at 4,450 rpm — and the Golf — with 170-horsepower five cylinder generating 177 foot-pounds of torque at 4,250 rpm — provide more power.

Yet, the higher-powered Focus has nearly the same fuel economy rating with automatic transmission — 27/38 mpg — as the Elantra GT.

Combined city/highway mileage in the test car was 32 mpg, and with regular unleaded all that's needed, it cost just over $50 to fill the 14-gallon tank, which is 1.6 gallons larger than that in the Focus.

Underneath the rigid body, the Elantra GT uses the same front-wheel drive platform of the Elantra sedan, but the steering and rear suspension are different.

Elantra GT's Driver Selectable Steering mode put onto the power-assisted, rack-and-pinion steering came with three choices — comfort, normal and sport.

But feedback still was far off and the overall effect seemed more a gimmick than a steering enhancement.

Meantime, the torsion axle rear uses Sachs shock absorbers for better body control.

In the test car, body motions were minimized, the car made lane changes without fuss and handled an emergency maneuver with poise and confidence.

Even better, the Elantra GT's compact size — it's 14 feet from bumper to bumper, which is 9 inches shorter than the Elantra sedan — makes it easy to park and nudge into congested streets.

Note that while the Elantra GT is compact, it doesn't feel lightweight.

There's a nice, mostly flat rear floor with 34.6 inches of legroom, which is better

than the 33.2 inches in the back seat of the Focus. The Golf has 35.5 inches of rear-seat legroom.

With rear seats folded down, cargo space in the Elantra GT expands to a generous 51 cubic feet.

Texture and appearance of the soft-touch plastic inside the car looked upscale, and optional leather upholstery was supple enough it wouldn't be confused with vinyl.

The two-part, optional panoramic sunroof is a first in the segment, Hyundai officials said, and it really lightens the interior.

Not optional is a soft-touch cover over the center storage area that doubles as an armrest. It slides forward and back to accommodate both short-stature and tall drivers.

The extra large display screen in the middle of the dashboard afforded better-than-usual views from the rearview camera.

The outside lens of this camera, by the way, is kept clean from water, snow and dirt because it only comes out from beneath the Hyundai badge on the rear liftgate when the car is shifted into reverse.

In the tester, there was a brief closing/snapping sound at the back of the car as the lens retreated inside and the badge came back down.

The Elantra GT earned five out of five stars, overall, in federal government crash testing.

All safety equipment is standard, including seven air bags. One is for the driver's right knee and helps keep the driver in proper position behind the steering wheel during a frontal crash.

Elantra sedans are built in an Alabama plant. Elantra GTs come from South Korea.

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