

Sonata Hybrid leads pack with warranty coverage, pricing

February 24 2016, by Ann M. Job

The 2016 Sonata Hybrid, Hyundai's only gasoline-electric offering, is a roomy sedan with improved fuel economy, value pricing and the longest warranty coverage in the industry.

When it comes to fuel sipping, the Sonata Hybrid earned a 42 mpg rating in combined city/highway travel from the federal government, tying the 2016 Ford Fusion Hybrid as best in the midsize, gasoline-electric hybrid sedan category.

Starting retail price, including destination charge, for the revamped Sonata Hybrid is \$26,835, which barely budged from the 2015 model, and the base model includes many standard features such as rearview camera, turn-signal lights integrated with the outside mirrors, keyless entry, push-button start, dual automatic climate control, hands-free trunk opener and heated side mirrors.

Competitors, such as the Toyota Camry Hybrid and Ford Fusion Hybrid, provide far less standard warranty coverage, and the Camry Hybrid is more expensive. Plus, the Sonata Hybrid has a lifetime warranty on the battery pack that stores electricity onboard and a 10-year or 100,000-mile warranty on the powertrain four-cylinder gasoline engine.

A pleasantly styled car that looks more expensive than it is, the Sonata Hybrid has a transmission that helps set it apart—a six-speed automatic that incorporates a 38-kilowatt electric motor.

And there's no plugging this car in, as the electric power is generated automatically by the electric motor, stored in a lithium-ion polymer battery pack and then tapped as needed. That allows for the Sonata Hybrid to operate on electric-only power at certain times, even at highway speeds when the gasoline engine and electric motor decouple, to help extend mileage and save gasoline.

Sonata Hybrid Limited test vehicle was not the smoothest in switching between power sources, with occasional hesitation and roughness. Also, the combined output of the 2-liter engine and electric motor decreased to 193 horsepower from 199 horsepower in the previous model.

Though the test vehicle didn't achieve the government's lofty mileage rating, it did average 35.1 mpg for more than 550 miles on a single, 15.85-gallon tank of fuel.

Smart features help extend the mileage. For example, the car comes standard with a driver-only climate control setting since there's no reason to heat or cool the entire interior if there's only one person inside.

The 16-foot-long, family-size car was especially fuel-efficient during short trips in city traffic. Three selectable drive modes in the Sonata Hybrid—Normal, Sport and Eco—are activated by a button, so drivers decide whether to maximize fuel mileage, sprightly performance or something in between.

Handling of the Sonata Hybrid was mainstream, not sporty, and the car rode comfortably over most road bumps.

Four adult passengers are no problem, and a fifth can squeeze into the middle of the back seats.

Front-seat legroom of 45.5 inches is accommodating for long-legged

riders and more than the front seats of the Camry and Fusion hybrids. But the rear-seat legroom (35.6 inches) is less than what the competitors offer.

For 2016, Hyundai more efficiently packaged the battery pack by stuffing it under the flat trunk floor instead of behind the rear seatbacks, like it is in the Fusion Hybrid. That allowed the company to increase trunk space to a class-leading 13.3 cubic feet, and the rear seatbacks now fold down.

Consumer Reports magazine projects Sonatas' reliability at above average, and the 2016 Sonata Hybrid earned five out of five stars in U.S. government crash testing.

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