Design Review of Hyundai-Elantra

Now we have all heard, understood and seen enough of the Hyundai Fluidic Sculpture design philosophy to talk about it all over again. The design language has been so successful that the cars that have adopted it have either already become the respective segment leaders or are on their way to become one. So it comes in as no surprise that Hyundai has had a confidence boost after the success of the new design philosophy - so much that they are bringing back a model name that went out of the Indian market, rather disappointingly. Remember the Elantra?
It was a good car, but the styling was too bland to cope up against the competition. The suspension was too soft for the Indian roads and bottomed out every now and then. And while it offered a comfortable ride quality, it did not have the brand value of a Toyota Corolla.

The response from our market had been so bad that the 4th generation model that debuted in the global market, wasn't even considered for India. But now Hyundai aims at fixing all of that and hopes that the new design philosophy will help the Elantra's revival in India - just the way it worked for the Verna. To get some early impressions of the new Elantra, we drove the car in Udaipur. Read on to know what we feel.

At first glance the Elantra just looks like a bigger Verna or a smaller Sonata, depending on the angle you are viewing from. The front end has the hexagonal grille that instantly establishes the familial connection. The headlights are shaped like the Verna but are larger and get a double-barrel layout. There are two prominent creases on the bonnet that flow into the grille and add further substance to the design.

The lines and creases flow onto the side profile too. There is one crease that extends from the headlight, all the way into the boot, forming the belt-line. The shoulder-line is marked by another crease that comes out from the taillights and flows into the front wheel arches. There is yet another crease towards the lower end of the car to add further 'flow' to the design. What I particularly like though is the coupe-ish roofline, which makes the Elantra stand out from the others in the segment.

The high-rise boot contributes further to this effect. When seen from the tail end, the boot looks humongous. The rear bumper is large too. However, you again have some creases on the tailgate. Add to it the Sonata-inspired two-piece taillights and the reflectors on the bumpers and you have a tail that doesn't look empty and boring. The tail will only get the variant badges when the Elantra goes on sale. The CRDI / VTVT / AUTO badges will find their place over the front right wheel-arch.

Overall, the fluidic design looks great on the Elantra as expected - and while the busy lines give the car a sense of motion even when it's stationary, the high-rise boot, the coupe-ish roofline and the aerodynamic
bonnet give the Elantra a low-slung stance that looks more aggressive than the likes of the new Volkswagen Jetta and the Chevrolet Cruze.

**Performance Review of Hyundai-Elantra**

India will be the only country to get the Elantra with a diesel engine.

Globally, the Elantra is sold with a 1.8-litre petrol engine that produces 150 PS of power and close to 178 Nm of torque. This engine makes it way to India but is also joined by the Elantra diesel - the only one of its kind in the world, for now. It is powered by the 1.6-litre diesel engine that you find in the Verna. It produces close to 128 PS of power and 260 Nm of torque. While the output sounds exactly similar to that of the Verna, the Elantra's engine has a slightly different tune considering the added weight of the car. Both these engines are available with a choice of manual or automatic six-speed gearbox, mated to a front wheel drive configuration. We managed to sample the diesel manual, diesel automatic and the petrol automatic versions.

The diesel engine to begin with, has high refinement levels. There is an audible burble the moment you start the car, but as the engine heats up the burble goes down to an extent. When moving from a standstill, you do feel a slight hint of turbo-lag even with a variable geometry turbocharger bolted onto the engine. The lag is evident even in the slow moving bumper-to-bumper traffic that you find in the metros. After around 1,800 RPM though, the engine provides a good torque build-up. The third, fourth and fifth gears...
offer good mid-range and allow quick roll-ons so quick overtaking in the city or on the highway isn’t a big task. Before I drove the Elantra, I did have my reservations on how good the diesel variant will be with its smaller capacity engine – but it does feel better than the Toyota Corolla Altis and the Renault Fluence – but the lack of displacement also means that it doesn’t feel as sprightly as the 2.0-litre oiler from the Volkswagen group.

The petrol engine is very refined too, but unfortunately I did not drive the one with a manual gearbox so as of now, I cannot comment on its overall performance. But as far as the automatic gearbox goes, it disappointed me initially on the highway. It seems sluggish to begin with and likes to take its own sweet time before deciding which gear it wants to shift into. When cruising on the highway, when you dab the throttle further to initiate an overtake, the gear box will downshift, rev all the way to a notch below the red line to help you make an overtake - but then it will stay at those high revs for a good two or three seconds before shifting to the next gear and repeating the process all over again. And because the gearbox makes the engine stay in high revs, you also get a significant bunch of vibrations on the pedals. The diesel automatic feels slightly better than its petrol counterpart, but for the manual variants, it will be the other way round.

There is a fair bit of road / tyre and wind noise from as low as 80 km/h and this is primarily because of the silica tyres. The presence of silica in the tyres not only provides better grip on wet roads, it also reduces the rolling resistance of the tyres. Expectedly, these tyres are more expensive than your regular rubber, but the low rolling resistance also translates into better fuel economy. Adding to this effect is the aerodynamic design of the Elantra, which in technical terms, has a 0.28 cD (co-efficient of drag). In layman’s terms it all sums up to provide an overall fuel economy of close to 10 kmpl for the petrol engine and over 13 kmpl for the diesel. But we’ll have to wait for a full-fledged road test to validate those figures in the real world.

While the tyres provide good grip, the soft suspension setup on the Elantra – especially at the back – imparts a fair bit of body roll. So pushing the car feels unnerving. The tyres grip as if they are on rails, but the entire cabin rocks like a boat. Even the steering feels lifeless – and interestingly, the steering felt different on all the three variants that I drove. On the diesels it felt very light and on the petrol variant it felt a tad heavier. But on all the vehicles, the steering had absolutely no feedback at the centre position and little feedback otherwise. But for an enthusiast, the steering and the
suspension setup has been an area of complaint on almost each and every Hyundai sold in India. But if ride comfort is what you seek, then the setup is very good. All the three test cars I drove glided over the potholes and rumble strips in Udaipur without transferring any thuds to the cabin. The 205-60 section 16-inch rubber too contributes to this comfortable ride quality.

Overall, like most Hyundai cars, the Elantra too is tilted heavily towards comfort than enthusiastic driving. Expectedly, it does the job rather well – and with a good choice of engines and gearboxes that could make it the most fuel-efficient offering in this segment.

Conclusion

The Elantra has the potential to create a big stir in the executive car segment in India. Unlike the Sonata, it does have a frugal diesel offering that should attract customers to the showrooms. Like any other Hyundai, it also has a long list of features that is difficult to ignore. It all boils down to the pricing now. We expect the Hyundai Elantra to be priced between Rs 12 to 17 lakh when it goes on sale in August 2012. At that price point it has the firepower to take on the competition and erase the not-so-optimistic past that it has had in India