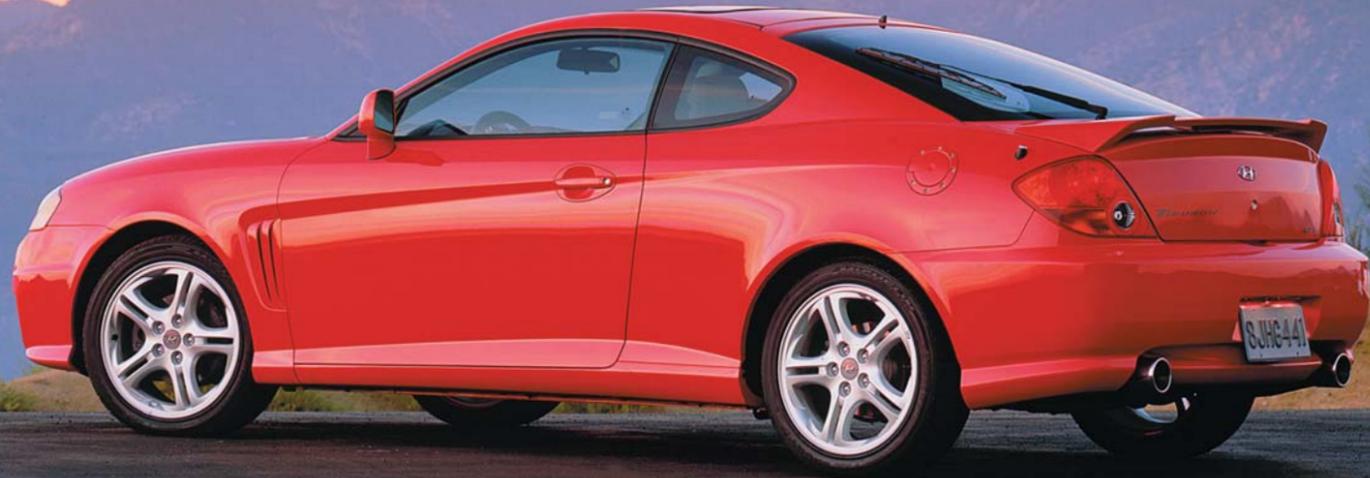


Pocket-Change Rocket!



by Larry Edsall

"The interior really reminds me of an Audi TT," a friend said as he admired the design features inside the car. As another walked up from behind the vehicle, he expressed his delight with the big exhaust tips that peek prominently from beneath the rear bumper, and with the way the 17-inch wheels and tires so nicely fill the space below the coupe's rear fenders.

A man in a nearby office saw us and decided to come out into the parking lot to take a look for himself.

The vehicle that attracted all this attention is the newest Hyundai Tiburon GT V6.

The Tiburon's Powertrain

Tiburon is the Spanish word for shark, and this shark-shaped coupe packs a shark-like bite thanks to its 2.7-liter V6 engine. The engine is the Hyundai-developed Delta powerplant that also powers the Santa Fe sport/utility vehicle and the mid-size Sonata sedan. The engine has an aluminum alloy block and heads and uses double overhead cams to generate 181 horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque.

That horsepower figure is almost

identical to the 180 ponies provided by the 1.8-liter four-cylinder engine in the Toyota Celica GT-S and falls well short of the 200 hp produced by the 2.0-liter four in the Acura RSX Type S. However, what separates the Tiburon from its competitors is torque; its 177 pound-feet figure dwarfs the Celica's 150 and even the Acura's 142.

While a high-output four-cylinder usually needs to be spun well up into its rev range to produce its power, the Tiburon's V6 feels strong even when the needle on the tachometer is far below redline, and the immediate and direct pickup of the car's clutch and the quick and direct shifting of the six-speed gearbox let the enthusiast driver make use of that power.

There's nothing finicky about this clutch and gearbox combination. You don't need fancy footwork to get them to work together. You don't have to hunt for the pickup point, nor do you have to hunt to move the shifter into an adjacent gear. Its throws are sure and certain whether you're going up, down or diagonally through the pattern.

In timed testing, *Motor Trend* magazine clocked the Tiburon GT V6 from zero to 60 mph in 7.01 seconds on its way to a 15.34 second quarter-mile time at 90.80 mph.

The engine is strong enough that you do have to be careful to avoid spinning the front tires off the line, but once they grip, the car pulls steadily as you work your way up the gearbox, even after you've reached sixth gear and gone well beyond the posted legal limit.

But you don't have to exceed the speed limit to enjoy this powertrain, or the package around it.

TIBURON IS SPANISH FOR SHARK, AND THIS SHARK-SHAPED COUPE PACKS A SHARK-LIKE BITE

Remarkable Value

There's at least one more thing that separates the Tiburon from the Toyota or Acura: price. The Celica GT-S has a base price of \$21,555. The Acura RSX Type S starts at \$23,170. The Tiburon GT V6 we drove lists for \$18,744 and that figure includes destination charges and the optional UltraSports Package 1, which for a mere \$250 includes a six-speed manual transmission, aluminum throttle, brake

and clutch pedals, a rear spoiler and cloth sports seats.

The Tiburon GT V6's \$17,999 base price includes leather seats, but Hyundai understands that enthusiast drivers who want things such as six-speed manual gearboxes and aluminum pedals also want cloth seats that hold them in place much better than slippery leather seats when they're out doing autocrosses or driving on twisting mountain roads, so they're part of the UltraSports option.

Tiburon in the High Country

We took a day and did a nearly 600-mile drive, heading east from Phoenix on US 60, then turning off at Globe on US 70



Photos: Hyundai

■ The Tiburon boasts changes inside and out.

through Safford. Just beyond Solomon we caught US 191 which takes you from the desert floor on a climb to more than 9,000 feet, where instead of tall saguaro your view is much taller Ponderosa pines.

The road is known as the Coronado Trail, but used to be called Route 666, and certainly lives up to that devilish designation with switchback twists and turns.

Generally speaking, the Tiburon was angelic on the drive. For most of the 100 or so miles up, into and over the mountains, the gearbox got a workout as we toggled back and forth between third and fourth gears.

However, early in the route, in an uphill, right-hand hairpin well dusted by a nearby mining operation, we were reminded how front-wheel-drive cars tend to understeer, even if their front wheels are wrapped by grippy, Z-rated Michelin Pilot Sport tires with their deep V tread pattern. We also learned that anti-lock brakes are an option on the Tiburon, an option not included on our test car. Don't worry; nothing horrible happened; we just used a little more of the pavement than we'd expected, and then took subsequent hairpins a little

slower and wiser.

Unfortunately, ABS is not a stand-alone option, and to get it on your Tiburon GT V6 with a six-speed gearbox you have to order the UltraSports Package 3 that includes a power sunroof and costs \$1,998. Maybe Hyundai doesn't "get it" quite as much as we thought.

The V6 and six-speed provided plenty of power for the sometimes steep climb into the mountains, and the Michelins,



■ The Coronado Trail offers hairpin curves and elevation changes, a great workout for the six-speed.

mounted on unique five-spoke wheels, worked with the 11.0-inch front and 10.2-inch rear disc brakes and with the sport-tuned GT suspension to make the drive an enjoyable experience.

Totally New and Turning Heads

There was no 2002 model Tiburon; the '03 is all new. The original 1997 Tiburon was built on the Elantra sedan platform. But the 2003 gets its own chassis, which is stiffer, provides a 2.2-inch longer wheelbase and an inch-wider front track. The chassis includes a front subframe and revised hydraulic engine mounts.

The front suspension is MacPherson struts with offset springs and with the antiroll bar mounted directly to the strut. At the rear is a strut-based multi-link setup. The GT gets stiffer springs and shocks, with revised rebound valving, and thicker antiroll bars front and rear.

The car was remarkably quiet and confidently surefooted, even at substantial straight-line speeds. At reasonable speeds, we had time to appreciate such things as the seven-speaker Infinity audio system with its CD player (and cassette, too) with an eight-inch subwoofer

mounted in the cargo hold.

The GT V6 has a thick, leather-wrapped, tilting three-spoke steering wheel, a grippy shifter, black and gray cloth seats, intuitive switchgear and large air conditioning vents. The front seats were supportive yet comfortable, and we didn't suffer even after nearly 600 miles on the road in a single day.

The interior has some nice touches that could go unnoticed on short drives. For

example, there's a notch where the center stack meets the floor console, and that notch provides some room for the driver's right knee, which doesn't have to rest against a hard surface.

Front seat-mounted side airbags are standard in the GT V6. So are remote entry, air conditioning, cruise control, variable intermittent wipers, carpeted floor mats and the Infinity audio system.

The '03 Tiburon is more than two inches longer, more than an inch wider and half-an-inch taller than the '01 model, and beneath that sheetmetal it provides 81.9 cubic feet of passenger space, plus 14.7 cubic feet for cargo. But don't try to sit in the back seats.

We tried—tried being the operative word—because we quickly discovered that even a short adult male cannot sit there. Even Hyundai has installed a warning sticker on the hatchback roof, reminding someone loading the cargo area not to slam the hatch closed while someone is sitting in the back seat.

Hyundai publicity materials say the chrome-ringed gauges are "easy-to-

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Photo: Larry Edsall



Photo: Hyundai

■ The Coronado Trail is a serpentine route that snakes its way from the desert floor to elevations of more than 9000 feet in the mountains near the Arizona-New Mexico border. Hyundai's new Tiburon sports coupe provides a comfortable and stylish way to enjoy the views, and this little road shark packs a nice bite for eating up the miles.

>> cont'd from page 27

read," and they are at night when they provide red-orange numbers against a black background. But in daylight, we found them almost impossible to read through sunglasses.

Tuned and Ready

Hyundai is racing the Tiburon, modified for competition with all-wheel drive and a 398-horsepower, turbocharged four-cylinder engine, in the SCCA ProRally series

and Hyundai and aftermarket companies have done Tiburon tuning that includes stainless steel exhaust, 19-inch wheels, 13.5-inch Brembo front brakes (with cross-drilled rear rotors) and Eibach springs that lower the car nearly an inch and a half.

But even in its standard skin, this Shark looks menacing and muscular. The body pinches inward between the flared front and rear fenders. There even are gill-like slits behind the front wheels. The car has a high waistline and a short, TT-like greenhouse with broad C-pillars that can

inhibit the driver's peripheral vision.

The headlights are chromed, multi-reflector units, a large and small one on each side of the small grille, set in gray-metallic housings behind covers that bulge out like a shark's eyes. Taillights also are stylish, multi-reflector units.

This Tiburon has no dorsal fin, but there is that high-mounted rear wing that warns of its presence. ■

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