Razor sharp elegance

By Joe Sage

The entire Hyundai lineup is solid. Value is high, styling sets trends and their warranty is unmatchable (except by Kia, of course). Two things have puzzled us in the lineup. One, why not give Genesis Coupe its own name? And two, where exactly does Azera fit in?

Once a full-size car (like Genesis Sedan), Azera is now a midsize (like Sonata). Last year, Azera struck us as more elegant, but the 2015 Genesis has changed all that—and Sonata has a new style launching now, too.

We stumbled upon a thread on social media during this timeframe. One person noted that the Korean version (Grandeur) had received a minor facelift front and rear recently, while he said US sales were in a slight decline this year, after having shot up by 33 percent last year. He questioned Azera's relevance. The other found Azera handsome and a "more emotional alternative" to Sonata and Genesis.

That's not a bad call. They're all attractive, so it's more of a styling distinction—Azera tends toward the four-door coupe trend. Last year, Azera started at just $1950 less than Genesis, base, while Sonata was $11-13,000 less than those two. This year, Hyundai has knocked $2150 off Azera's price, addressing this somewhat.

Azera's 293-hp V6 considerably outpowers the base 2014 Sonata's 190-hp 2.4L four, but negligibly so the Sonata 2.0T's 274-hp turbo four. (Sonata specs may change a little for 2015.) There is also a Sonata Hybrid. The 2015 Genesis Sedan with V8 hits 420 hp, but its six has 311 horses, again close to Azera.

Genesis has rear-wheel drive (the V6 has available all-wheel drive). Azera, like Sonata, is a front-driver. Suspension in the Genesis is the most sophisticated, though Azera's is very similar—and very good.

Overall, we might consider Azera "80 percent Genesis and 20 percent Sonata"—the nod to Sonata mostly because of Azera's front-wheel drive. Twenty percent is plenty, since Azera shows no noticeable torque steer or front-drive handling.

Differentiated by style and relatively minimal practical differences, Azera and Genesis strike us as filling a similar niche and budget, though officially different sizes and with their own flavors of styling. If you like Azera's looks (and front-wheel drive), then decide by that. We make big decisions all the time based on appearance. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE ....3.3-liter GDI V6
POWER/TORQUE ....293 hp / 255 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION ......6-speed auto w Shiftronic and active ECO system
DRIVETRAIN..FWD
WEIGHT ....3605-3825 lb
MPG..........................19/29/23 (city/hwy/comb)
INCLUDED: 18" alloy wheels w P245/45R18 tires (standard), heated/power-fold side mirrors, chrome-tipped dual exhaust, keyless entry/start, HID xenon auto headlights, heated front/rear leather seats, vented front seats, power seats w driver's cushion extension, power tilt/telescope wheel, dual zone climate and rear vents, 8" touchscreen nav w rear camera, Infiniti Logic 7 550-watt surround sound audio, HE-Sirius, interior ambient light, electroluminescent gauge cluster, color LCD trip computer, bluetooth, BlueLink telematics.

BASE PRICE 34,750
PREMIUM PACKAGE: 19-in hyper silver alloy wheels w P245/40R19 tires, panoramic tilt/slide sunroof, power rear sunshade, manual rear side window sunshades, rear parking assistance......................2150
CARPETED FLOOR MATS: 110
DESTINATION CHARGE:................................895

TOTAL **$35,695**

Azera brings you front-wheel-drive, power right between V6 Sonata and V6 Genesis, and its own sleek style.

LOGBOOK NOTES

The Azera performed best with use of its manumatic. (This is called Sports Mode, but it does not remap of shift or acceleration.)

The interior is creamy with black uppers in our sample, but with a coarse texture, fairly heavy stitching and coarse perforations.

Azera defines its spot in the lineup with big wheels, shallow cabin, wraparound taillights, chrome side upkick—strong, different, as much storm trooper cool as elegant.

ABS kicked in on a routine smooth curve, but that may be attributable to tire fitment. The car is relatively lightweight (3600-3800 lb), and we noted assured "sports car handling" belying its size in most instances.