

VELOCIROCKET

WHAT THE VELOSTER WAS BORN TO BE BY JOE SAGE

The new Hyundai N Brand will develop into a full lineup of performance vehicles, akin to Mercedes-AMG, Audi S/RS, BMW M, Lexus F, Nissan NISMO and others. The 2019 Veloster N—proclaimed “the most fun-to-drive Hyundai ever”—is the first to arrive in our market.

Many brands use a “halo car” to inspire excitement for the rest of their lineup—for instance, the Ford GT supercar, though few in sales, may bring people into the dealerships who are then more excited about buying a Focus. It’s sort of a production version of “race on Sunday, sell on Monday.”

Hyundai’s approach to the N Brand is a “reverse halo.” Rather than creating an expensive car with a high-performance aura, they are building upon a car at the affordable end of the scale, for a sort of accessible exclusivity, in that ever-popular niche that usually requires a bunch of aftermarket mods, the pocket rocket. This plan simultaneously exposes the broader marketplace to the new N Brand and a new set of customers to Hyundai—who are as dead serious about the performance capabilities of their new sub-brand as their target market is.

Performance bloodlines run deep for Hyundai, and the N Brand arrives with plenty of heritage. Its US chief product spokesman Derek Joyce’s résumé includes the planning and development teams

for both the Hyundai Tiburon and the 350-hp rear-drive Hyundai Genesis Coupe in the past.

The brand’s World Rally Championship cars (see our May/June 2015 Rally México cover story), are i20 hatchbacks, a model not sold in the US. Also in the global lineup is the i30, which is the Elantra GT hatchback in the US. An i30 N was the first N Brand car to market, hitting Europe at the start of the year in both hatch and coupe versions. The Veloster N followed, introduced in South Korea mid-year, and our domestic Veloster N arrives next.

“N” stands for both the Namyang, South Korea R&D facility, where the Veloster N was conceived, and for the famed Nürburgring course in Germany, where its capabilities were honed.

Hyundai chose the lower-slung Veloster in our market for its better roll, pitch and yaw metrics, due to the lower profile itself and the accompanying reduced glass and steel of that profile.

Sales in Europe and South Korea have massively outpaced projections. They had predicted 2,800 units for the entire year in Europe, but by September had sold 4,678 with another 1,294 on backorder. In Korea, they had forecast just 100 units for June through December, but 785 were delivered June to September, with 284 more on backorder.

The halo effect has worked wonders. In Europe,

82 percent of N buyers are new to the Hyundai brand, while in Korea it’s 85 percent. The cars are also bringing in younger buyers—much younger. Most brands work very hard to bring average buying ages down just a year or two, but the European i30 N has dropped the average age by 19 years (to 32), and the Korean Veloster N has dropped the average by 11 years (to 36). Younger buyers are welcome not only because they can be repeat buyers for longer, but because they are generally considered to have higher technical expectations, while at the same time buying for emotional as well as rational reasons. One of the themes for N is “we don’t just build cars; we create a feeling,”

and this is taken as confirmation of that approach.

To get a full feel for the fruits of their labor and what awaits you at the dealership soon, we joined Hyundai’s N Brand team at Thunderhill Raceway Park, about 85 miles north of Sacramento, where we could really wring it out.

Hyundai N Brand has worked to deliver top performance at an entry price—the standard model is expected to come in below \$28,000, and a Performance Package below \$30,000—benefitting, as in so many instances, from Hyundai’s in-house steel-making and machining capabilities.

There were three key pillars in development of the Hyundai Veloster N—it was to be a “corner rascal,” i.e. the car loves corners; it had to be an everyday sports car, a good daily driver; and it had to have race track capability, as built, with no extra options needed. There would be “N Line” packages available (in a similar fashion to the

KEEP RIGHT >>

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	alum Theta 2.0L turbo GDI 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	250 (opt 275) hp / 260 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.5:1
TRANSMISSION	rev-match 6-spd manual
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
DIFFERENTIAL	Opt: N Corner Carving Diff; e-LSD limited slip diff w/ electronic control
SUSPENSION	Electronically controlled: F: McPherson strut, 23mm (opt 21mm) stblzr bar; R: multi-link, 19mm stblzr bar;
STEERING	rack mounted motor driven PS
BRAKES	F: 13.0 (opt 13.6) x 1.2 vented; R: 11.8x0.5 solid (opt 12.4x0.8 vented)
WHEELS/TIRES	18x7.5 alloy / 225/40R18 (opt) 19x8.0 / 235/35R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	167.9 / 104.3 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.1 / 35.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.6 / 34.1 in
SEATING CAPACITY	four
CARGO CAPACITY	19.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3036-3117 lb
FUEL CAPACITY	13.2 gal
MPG	22/28/25 (city/hwy/comb)

TARGET PRICING:	
STANDARD PACKAGE	< \$28,000
PERFORMANCE PACKAGE	< \$30,000

INCLUSIONS

SAFETY FEATURES: Driver’s blind spot mirror, rear camera w/ dynamic guidelines, vehicle stability mgmt (VSM), electronic stability control (ESC), traction control system (TCS), 4-wheel disc anti-lock brakes (ABS), occupant classification system (OCS) and more.

EXTERIOR FEATURES: Projector headlights, LED low-beam headlights, rear LED taillights, dual folding power heated gloss black side mirrors, side mirror turn indicators, window beltline black molding, body color door handles, LED DRLs, auto headlight control, gloss black rear spoiler w/ LED CHMSL, unique gloss black grille, tinted glass, front 2-spd variable intermittent wipers/washers, rear wiper, shark-fin antenna and more.

INTERIOR FEATURES: LED shift-timing indicator, a/c, power windows/locks, driver’s auto-up window, 6-way adjustable driver seat, driver height adjustment, front passenger slide/recline, center armrest w storage bin, front/rear door map pockets w bottle holders, cloth seats, 60/40 fold-down rear seat, rear cupholders and storage console, alloy pedals, 12v outlet, front cupholders, dual vanity mirrors w cover, tilt-telescopic wheel, exterior temperature display, proximity key entry w push button start, Bluetooth hands-free phone system w phonebook transfer, steering-wheel-mounted cruise, rev match control, steering-wheel-mounted audio and Bluetooth controls, 8” display, Infinity premium audio system w external amp & subwoofer, 8 speakers, Apple/Android, Blue Link Connected Car System, 4.2” color TFT cluster display, phone/MP3 aux input jacks, dual charging USB and more.





optional electronic limited slip differential (e-LSD).

The N ESC is also calibrated for everyday driving, as are its seats, its 250-hp/260-lbft 2.0L GDI twin-scroll turbo engine—itsself a notable jump up from the standard Veloster Turbo's 201-hp 1.6L turbo—and its adjustable drive modes.

On the track, Veloster N benefits from its rear spoiler, enhanced cooling, selectable (on/off) rev matching that can render heel-and-toe skills obsolete, an appropriately subtle yet thrilling exhaust note, up-specced N brakes, even a model-specific short-throw shifter for its 6-speed manual, with precise gate feel in your hand. The car's spirit is at your fingertips from the driver's seat through not only its performance and the shifter, but also a model-exclusive steering wheel and gauges (including nifty sequential signal indicator lights).

It's a formula for engaged and spirited driving. In line with its dual mission as a daily driver—an "only car" for many owners—Hyundai emphasizes that they don't expect to have a top track's fastest speed or lap time, but when it comes to cornering, it's a champ. Hence our use of Thunderhill Raceway for a first drive. This was our chance to prove out the engineers' track-based mission and its suitability for full-time use—dynamic response and endurance that does not fade.

The car's high durability N transmission with double-layer facing clutch disk and carbon synchro ring can handle extra fast downshifting provided by the rev-matching manual. A launch control feature helps newer drivers tap the max out of the system.

Though a solid performer, the Veloster N is not intended to be "a fancy, expensive car," says Albert Biermann, president and head of Hyundai's Vehicle Performance Division. This approach to top engi-

neering but performance-entry price positioning is shown in the brakes, an in-house build. Bearing red "N" calipers, pricey third-party brakes such as Brembo were purposely avoided, with N Brand's in-house design (13-in front and 11.8 rear, single piston) not only intended to provide the same kind of strong non-fade performance, but to also be affordable when replacement time rolls around. ("If you can't afford to fix it, you can't afford to own it," as the saying goes.) Front fascia ducting provides strong air cooling to the front brakes.

For our long track day, optional larger brakes (13.6-in, 12.4-in) were installed, but Biermann says the average owner would not need those for a typical half-day track session.

Aerodynamics and airflow tech—including the brakes' air curtain ducts, plus a front cooling duct, front splitter, rear spoiler and aerodynamic side skirts—plant the car solidly on the pavement. "We want your heartbeat going up because of enjoyable driving," says Biermann, not because of surprises from an unplanted car.

The car's body and chassis ("the most important suspension part," per Biermann) receive additional strength from reinforced welds throughout the body shell, chassis reinforcements to transfer lateral load, and reinforced front shock mounts—adding up to a 6.9 percent increase in torsional stiffness over the base model. Hyundai always benefits from the rare fact that they own their own steel foundries, making extensive use of high-strength steel possible without driving up the cost.

N Power Sense axle geometry improves traction, reduces the roll angle and increases lateral support up front during acceleration. You can still tell a bit that it's a front-driver, but hot hatch fans embrace that, and it's mitigated by increased yaw response in the rear axle. Front-drive torque steer is also reduced through the smarts of the rack-mounted electronic power steering unit, which compensates in hard cornering (or on uneven surfaces), requiring fewer sudden driver responses.

Veloster N's corner-carving strength comes from several engineering advances. Its ESC—with normal, sport and "off" modes—detects banked track conditions and responds accordingly, with several levels of brake-applied torque vectoring. Electronics in the optional limited slip differential reduce slip and understeer, increasing that carving feel. And electronically controlled variable valve suspension—comprising both wheel and body sensors—detects loads by road or track use and controls dive, roll and lift accordingly.

Active sound control in the exhaust does more than provide sound effects—when running in N mode, it actually retards ignition timing to create explosive crackling and afterburn popping sounds.

One place the Veloster N did tap top-rated performance third parties is where the rubber meets the road. Standard are 18-inch Michelin Pilot Super Sport summer tires; optional are Pirelli HN-code 19-inch tires developed specifically to the car's chassis dynamics on track, while bearing a tougher sidewall for everyday roads. There are also Pirelli Trofeo N streetable competition tires available for the 19-inch wheels (which were available to us at Thunderhill), as a dealer option.

Veloster N goes up against such others as VW Golf GTI, Ford Focus ST and Honda Civic Type R. Low, wide and nimble, Veloster is the shortest of the set (just a hair shorter than the GTI) and the lowest by quite a bit. At its base weight, it's also the lightest.

The list of standard inclusions is generous (see previous page), from keyless start and automatic climate control, to LED lights front and rear, to an 8-inch audio display with Infinity premium sound, Android and Apple connectivity and the full suite of Blue Link connected car apps and features.

It would all be quite a lot for that under-\$28k anticipated price, even without its track capabilities. The Performance Package that can add about \$2 grand bumps the engine from 250 to 275 hp, adds the N Corner Carving e-LSD limited slip diff, includes the variable exhaust valve system, bumps wheels and tires up to 19-inches with the lower-profile Pirelli P Zero summer tires, and brings you those upsized brakes.

All copies come with that 6-speed manual now, though there is talk of a high-performance dual-clutch automatic a couple of years down the road. Preserving weight and headroom, there is no sunroof. The 2019 Hyundai Veloster N is available in Racing Red, Phantom Black, Chalk White and of course its trademark rallysport Performance Blue—and looks superb in all colors.

With its performance credentials already firmly cemented—Bryan Herta Autosport has already taken the TCR Manufacturers' Title in the 2018 Pirelli World Challenge road racing series in the European sister car, the i30 N—the 2019 Hyundai Veloster N goes on sale by the end of the year. ■



SACTO TO THUNDERHILL & BACK

Saving the new 2019 Hyundai Veloster N drive for the track, but with our lodging in Sacramento, 85 miles to the south via I-5, we drove a refreshed 2019 Hyundai Tucson north and Elantra south between the two.

2019 Hyundai Tucson This third-generation compact crossover introduced in 2016 has received a midcycle refresh for 2019, with upgrades inside and out, including a new cascading grille, new center stack design, more advanced safety features and expanded connectivity options. The prior 1.6 turbo has been discontinued from the lineup, with base models bearing a 161-hp 2.0L Nu 4-cylinder and SEL-and-up models fitted with a 181-hp 2.4L Theta 4-cylinder, all running through the same 6-speed-w-OD transmission to either front- or all-wheel drive. Ours was a top trim Ultimate AWD model. Also new are an electronic parking brake, auto stop-start (2.4L), new 17-, 18- and 19-inch wheels, rain-sensing wipers on top trims, available second row USB and wireless charging on upper trims, expanded Hyundai SmartSense driver assistance tech varying by trim level, and three new exterior paint colors.

2019 Hyundai Elantra Sedan Following in the footsteps of the prior introduction of new 2018 Elantra GT and GT Sport hatchbacks comes a new Elantra sedan, with its own completely distinct sheet metal tip to tail, including a markedly different grille design. (The car had been revealed to us at the new Santa Fe launch this summer in Utah, but this was our first drive time.) It, too, receives an expanded set of SmartSense tech on mid to upper trims, has new 15-, 16- and 17-inch wheel designs (15s are for the fuel-frugal Eco model), a new center stack with revised air handling and storage options, wireless charging available on top trim models, and an upgraded rear camera with dynamic guidelines.

Both were notably spacious, comfortable and capable on our 90-minute drives. ■



forementioned German and Japanese brands), with styling cues and refined powertrain and chassis, while the full "N" models are engineered and built with fully dedicated powertrains, chassis and technology. Though the Veloster N is considered 100 percent ready as is, there are also a series of N options if you'd like to juice it up even more.

Toward its cornering goal, the Veloster N has upgraded suspension, transmission, tires, steering, its own N electronic stability control (ESC) and an