



Nearing the Nth degree

BY JOE SAGE



In line with a number of high-end brands, Hyundai has been developing “N” vehicles, highly performance-oriented builds, starting with the track-conquering Veloster N, which we drove at Thunderhill Raceway Park in Northern California during its launch in 2018. Next up is the Elantra N.

Also in line with a number of other brands, Hyundai is offering an “N Line” treatment to certain models in its lineup—Elantra, Sonata and Kona so far—partly a visual treatment, but also with a degree of performance upgrades. On the new Sonata N Line, these include engine, clutch, final gear ratio, brakes, steering, and tires and wheels.

This brings the Sonata lineup to five trim levels, starting at \$23,600. N Line is fourth up, at \$33,200 being \$5000 above the SEL Plus, while Sonata Limited is still tops, at \$650 above that. (Though not a full N model, Sonata N Line’s price differential is about the same as Veloster N’s against its next model down.

Elantra will be the only model, so far, offering both N and N Line.

We met the newest eighth-generation Hyundai Sonata at its launch drive (held in Arizona) at the very end of 2019—one of our last live events before the pandemic lockdown hit—covered in detail in our Jan/Feb 2020 issue. At that time, they had a camouflaged Sonata on site at our hotel, generating much curiosity, as intended. Toward the end of the event, we had a chance to drive it on the streets of Paradise Valley, learning it would be the new N Line when completed. Details and drive impressions were embargoed, till now.

The Hyundai Sonata N Line is now complete, going on sale a 2021 model, and we’ve just spent a full week with it.

Incorporating Hyundai’s “Sensuous Sportiness” design language, Sonata N Line’s exterior elements include a cascading grille, aggressive front fascia, three air intakes, various N Line

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	Smartstream 2.5L turbo GDI + MPI DOHC 16v inline-four
HP/TORQUE	290 hp / 311 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
TRANSMISSION	8-spd N wet dual clutch
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut, gas shocks, stblzr bar; R: multi-link, gas shocks, stblzr bar
STEERING	rack mounted motor driven pwr
BRAKES	F: 13.6" vented; R: 12.8" solid
WHEELS / TIRES	19x8.0J alum alloy / 245/40 R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	192.9 / 111.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.9 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w/sunroof) 40.0 / 37.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	46.1 / 34.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	16.0 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.3 in
WEIGHT	3552 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unleaded / tbd gal
MPG	23/33/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$33,200
SUMMER TIRES	no info
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	155
DESTINATION CHARGE	not stated

(Our sample's Monroney sticker had no pricing, though some information has now been released)

badges, side skirts and 19-inch alloy wheels combining to create an aggressive stance, and an N Line rear diffuser, sleek black rear bumper and dual twin exhausts in the rear.

The interior features dark chrome trim and N Line red stitching on sport seats and wheel.

N or N line, you expect performance, and the Sonata N Line’s 290-hp turbo and wet dual clutch transmission deliver. Four drive modes include Sport and Sport+. We were happier around town in Sport, as Sport+, at least anecdotally, seems to wholly or partly defeat traction control, creating quite a handful in some situations with this combination of power and front-wheel drive.

As always, there are a number of things we’d change in instrumentation and controls—better readability of digital gauges in various light, the ability to turn some features off rather than just high-medium-low, the push-button shifter and a few more.

If shopping this category, you might compare with other Sonata trims, or you might compare with other brands’ semi-performance models. Either way, it’s easy to end up with the Sonata N Line’s particular combination of features, performance and price. ■

