Hyundai Santa Fe Calligraphy – Road Test

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Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales) writes, “If you have a big family I don’t think there is anything to touch the Hyundai Santa Fe when it comes to room, comfort and interior design features at this price”.

Aimed squarely at the US market to begin with, this is a big, very big car, which fills and sometimes overhangs most parking bays. There is large and then there's extra large, a category the Hyundai flagship model really fulfils.

The Santa Fe was Hyundai's first SUV and launched in 2001, five generations ago in the model series and today comes in Premium, Ultimate and new Calligraphy trim levels from £47,890 to £58,745. Seven seats are standard but there is an £1,000 option to choose six seats and a revised interior, while powertrains are a mix of hybrid and plug-in hybrid with 2WD or 4WD with slightly differing power outputs.

Our Calligraphy top-level trim featured 20" black alloy wheels, Hidden C Pillar Assist Handle, UV-C Compartment, Premium Relaxation front seats and Nappa Leather seat trim, as well as black finish styling elements including Skid Plate.

It comes with the seven-seat configuration inc. 50:50 third row seats and all wheel drive.

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At over two tonnes it is a heavy car as well and the modest petrol engine even with electric motor assistance does sometimes struggle to give of its best, particularly with five or more seats taken.

As a result, acceleration is slow and emissions are high and unless you're careful the economy can suffer. The powertrain and price also hits you in the

wallet with road tax duties for five years from reregistration.

Costs aside, the Santa Fe is striking both outside and in with eye-catching front end and clean crisp interior styling and detailing.

The big, deeply padded and wide adjusting seats cacoon driver and passengers, even those in the third row once they wiggle into place after the outside pair of second row seats are slipped forward.

The driver has a responsive if hard working petrol hybrid engine and really smooth changing automatic transmission to foot and hand. Noise level from the engine is very low until it’s extended and then becomes much more noticeable while the assisting electric motor is fairly quiet at all times.

The powertrain is at its best on main roads and motorways where it settles into a hum as it covers the miles and never seemed to stress even if it laboured a bit with a load on long gradients.

The car’s steering was effortless, well weighted to give feedback and did not suffer from road bumps or vibrations but you had a lot of arm twirling to negotiate tight spaces when parking.

Underfoot, the brakes were well up to their task, with only modest pressure needed to effect a rapid, controlled stop and the parking brake locked it up securely ready to fly-off as the throttle was engaged.

Secondary controls were all close to hand and fingers on the spokes and

column and the big instruments ahead of the driver were clear and well marked. The central infotainment screen was generously sized, easy to read and all functions quickly engaged.

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We liked the output and distribution from the heating and ventilation system throughout the big cabin, another plus point in a family car, with clear accurate controls backed up by powered windows.

Now any test of a family car is the amount, size and shape of oddments' places and the Santa Fe had a large number of well positioned, reasonably commodious and sensibly defined trays, bins, pockets and compartments. The loadbed floor was conveniently high, deep and wide and the third row seats quickly folded down to double capacity before the second row was dropped too. The access was good from the back and sides as well.

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Their ride comfort was very good with a lot of support under the legs and wrapped around the body as well as moving fore or aft to suit occupants' preferences. This meant the room was versatile and plentiful. Access was also easy for nearly every user.

Once inside, the visibility was excellent with slim roof pillars, deep windows, big wipers and strong lights even on dip beam.

The handling was definitely biased towards softness rather than sportiness,

with noticeable body roll as well as pitching and dipping under acceleration or braking. Nevertheless the 4WD helped keep everything planted on the road and there was never a moment's concern when cornering.

Our overall fuel consumption was within a mile or two on each journey and it never went below 40 mpg even when pushed so the hybrid system really worked well to recover and utilise the expended energy.

VERDICT

Anyone considering or needing a seven-seat car with a strong element of user appeal, who values something looking and being different would be wise to take a Santa Fe for a test run.

For: Immense room, extremely comfortable, smooth ride, highly versatile interior with lots of oddments space, economical, very highly equipped.

Against: Average performance, high emissions, big to park, attracts road tax penalties for five years.


SANTA FE
hybrid
ET24 UKD


HYBRID

Fast facts:

Hyundai Santa Fe Calligraphy

Price: £53,890

Mechanical: 215 PS 4 cyl 1.6 litre petrol/ hybrid, 6 speed Auto AWD

Max speed: 98 mph

0 – 62 mph: 13.2 secs

Consumption: 43 mpg

Insurance group: 37

CO2 emissions: 167 g/km

BiK: 37%, £1,360FY, £620SRx5

Warranty: 5 years/ unlimited miles

Size: L 4.83 m (15.85 ft), W 1.90 m (6.23 ft), H 1.78 m (5.84 ft)

Bootspace: 621 to 1,949 litres (21.93 to 68.83 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 2,030 kg (4,475 lb)