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Hyundai Santa Fe Ultimate 1.6T PHEV – Road Test

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The obvious doesn't always stare you in the face and it's therefore easy to overlook, at your cost, writes Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales).

Take the Hyundai Santa Fe, the big, very big, seven-seater SUV which is probably eclipsed in many eyes by its Korean stablemates along with much more expensive competitors from German and British car plants.

The Hyundai Santa Fe was launched as the company's first SUV in 2001 and it's been sold around the world in five generations since, culminating in Hybrid or Plug-in- Hybrid EV today in Britain.

The Santa Fe Hybrid and Plug-in Hybrid come in Premium, Ultimate and Calligraphy trim levels.

The Santa Fe Hybrid Premium costs from £46,775, the Ultimate begins at £50,275 and the Calligraphy goes from £52,775. The same trim levels with PHEV technology are £51,885, £55,135 and £57,635 respectively.

Sticking with our Ultimate PHEV, standard equipment includes 20-inch alloys, leather interior, tilt and slide glass sunroof, Bose 12-speaker sound and Head Up Display.



Unusually, the Santa Fe can be specified with seven seats or in six-seat layout including captain's chairs and reclining third row seats in either configuration.

The latest fifth generation Santa Fe bears a strong physical resemblance to a much more familiar rival but that's where the similarity ends. The Santa Fe is better in many ways.

Not only will it comfortably seat seven, including if necessary two adults in the third row, but it has space and grace along with refinement and really low running costs.

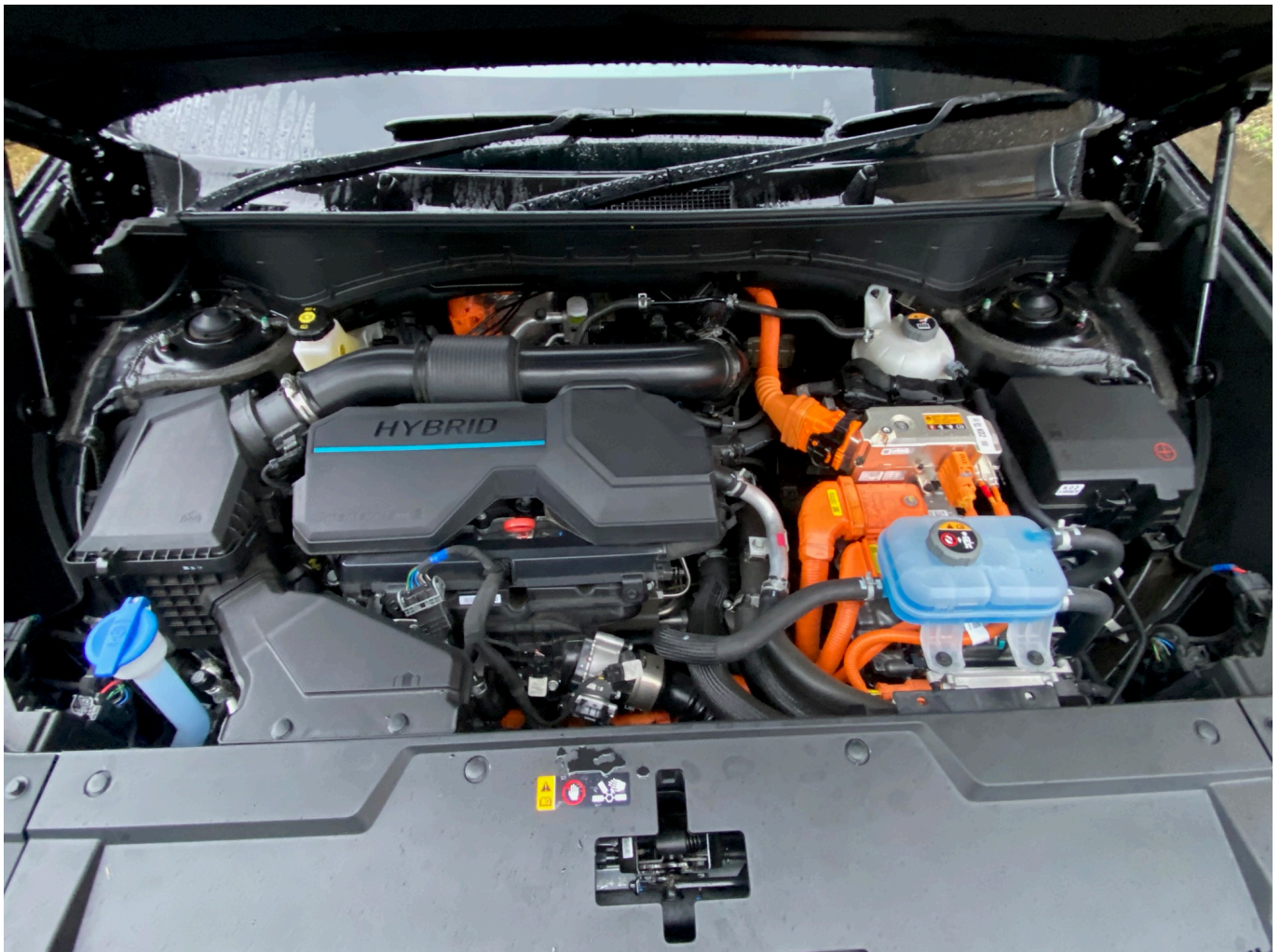
It has incredibly low emissions so attracts a modest BiK tax if buying through a business and insurance is about average, maybe less than some direct competitors. Then there is the matter of fuel economy.

As a hybrid it can be charged from a home point and will cover about 33 miles on its 13.8



kWh battery, really enough for the average commute, but then the comparatively small petrol engine kicks in and we found the combination gave the Ultimate PHEV a consistent average of 42mpg. And that's for a seven-seater weighing two tonnes.

The 1.6 litre engine seems modest and yet with the motor assistance and a turbocharger pushing fuel into the four cylinders its performance belies its size, when not heavily laden. It worked hard and let you know with a constant and then rising noise level but it remained very eager and the automatic gearchanges were very smooth up or down the box.



The driver can maximise performance or economy by selecting from an impressive seven



running modes which include the ability to power only the front wheels or use only the traction battery, or select sport mode for rapid progress and there are settings in between.

Steering was easy but it had a large turning circle if parking and it felt a bit detached at speed through winding corners. Brakes were very good and the parking brake securely held it and instantly released as the throttle depressed.

Secondary stalk controls were close to hand although hidden behind the wheel spokes which also carried minor functions easily operated by thumbs. There were further switches along the fascia and on the centre console tray.

Main instruments in front of the driver were big, clear and nicely calibrated with a head up display projected onto the screen as well.

The impressive infotainment screen stretched more than halfway across the fascia and contained all a driver might need to know and presented it with big graphics and sharpness.



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For occupant comfort the heating and ventilation, heated seats, warmed windows and multitude of vents combined with a big opening sunroof and powered windows throughout ensured any desired balance of air was possible.

Oddments space was really good in front, behind and even for those in the two back seats.

The thigh-high loading floor behind an electric tailgate was bigger than most, easy to use and empty, came with a retracting cover and had more space beneath. The rearmost seats could be dropped flat to double the capacity for five-seats to be used and if you needed still more room the middle three seats which had an adjustable recline as well could also be stowed to give over 1,940 litres (68.51 cu.ft) maximum capacity and about 6 ft (1.83 m) length for a load.

Access to the third row was a bit of a jiggle but once in place an adult would find legroom was good and those in the middle row had an easier time getting in or out, still had a lot of room and the front pair were spacious. All seats were very well shaped, carefully padded and most had reach and rake adjustment. It really is a fine family car more akin a prestige saloon than an SUV.

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The Santa Fe Ultimate uses its long travel suspension to good effect soaking up bumps and potholes, with a bit of body sway on tight turns being the only penalty.

Roadholding was good and once used to the slow steering it could be confidently pushed along country lanes.

On a motorway it was rock steady and gobbled up the miles.

The 20-inch wheels and tyres did generate a bit of constant road noise and some coarse surfaces did intrude as well, but the low engine and near absence of wind noise were appreciated.



Sitting in the cabin, you can appreciate the careful design highlights include a really extensive suite of background lighting possibilities throughout, leather and soft plastic details as well as wood-effect panel touches and not a huge amount of hard plastic surfaces. It looks like a much more expensive interior than you might consider at the price.

VERDICT

Spacious seven seater, practical, sophisticated. The fact it comes with a five years unlimited mileage warranty could be the icing on the cake.

For: Extremely roomy and very comfortable, excellent seats, clear visibility, precise controls, smooth powertrain, well equipped, good warranty with average insurance.

Against: Big to park and handle, some body roll, busy engine note when stretched and constant low level road & suspension noises, modest performance.



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FAST FACTS

Hyundai Santa Fe Ultimate PHEV

Price: £55,135



Mechanical: 265 PS 4 cyl 1600cc petrol engine inc 66.9 kW motor assistance, 6 speed, 4WD

Max Speed: 118 mph

0 - 62 mph: 9.1 secs

Combined MPG: 42

Insurance Group: 23

C02 emissions: 38 g/km

Bik rating: 12%, £ZeroFY, £590SRx5

Warranty: 5 years/ unlimited mileage

Rating: 4.5 / 5

Size: L 4.83 m (15.85 ft), W 1.90 m (6.23 ft), H 1.77 m (5.81 ft)

Bootpace: 621 to 1,942 litres (21.93 to 68.58 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 2,000 kg (4,409 lb)