

LIFE AFTER SPORT!



TEST DRIVE

Santa Cruise

Hyundai's latest soft-roader delivers in impressive style

Hyundai wants you to buy this car. It really, really does. If it could do any more to get you sitting in the passenger seat with a grin on your face and a "Just Sold!" sticker plastered on the windscreen, it would do it.

The ad for the Santa Fe, currently growling under my foot around the wilder portions of NSW, is the one with Kostya Tszuy in boxing gloves, driving the kids to school while taking a detour through the rainforest. "Buy me", coos the message, "This car is all your cars rolled into one. It's for on the road, off the road, it's safe, green, tough and easy to drive. It might even walk your dog. You can't not say yes."

They're right to try so hard. Times are tough for big cars. It started in the States with those specially widened fat-person transporters. Now GM is on the street begging for loose coins.

The 2009 Santa Fe is a little classier, more solid and less plasticky than before and comes with a series of optional extras. To pack all this into a fairly big "soft-roader" for \$38,990 is... Well, exactly what's required. They really, really want you to buy this car.

As the trails grow ever steeper and more uneven, I reflect on the two most important features of the '09 version. Normally a front-drive (with a 4WD lock), the computer senses when the traction suddenly goes west and shoves power into the back wheels. The other geek-pleaser is what

Hyundai calls Trek 'n' Tow, a special kit that bolts on springs, damper units and other things. The Trek 'n' Tow is a good option if you want to give the kids a treat and take them to school via a grade three canyon.

Faced with a steep track that hasn't been graded since 1908 and is now drenched with rainwater, my Santa Fe – raised, strengthened and computerised – lifts up its skirts and tiptoes with impressive care to the bottom. I miss the frantic skidding of normal off-roading, but not that much.

All-round it's just a really impressive drive. Although still technically medium-sized (maybe medium is the new large), it feels roomy with space for all your camping gear, a couple of dogs and five comfortable people.

The Santa Fe 2.2 CRDi turbo is a diesel, which, depending on the time of day, year or month is a more or less expensive bowser option but it certainly gives you more keys to the tank. The diesel also offers a bit more torque, offset by the longish delay between stamping hopefully on the accelerator and being spat up the road by the big engine. Not much of a concern off-road but slightly scary when you need a sharp overtaking manoeuvre back in civilisation.

Like Monica Bellucci, the Santa Fe is quite tall and very well sprung, which makes for a soft ride when it gets bumpy (still thinking about Monica, aren't you?) but there's still plenty of cabin rock as I clamber over the really rough bits. On the road, however, Hyundai's patented ESP stability control system adds to a feeling of solidity and security at speed. The controls are clear and intuitive, including those on the leather-covered steering wheel, while there's built-in iPod connectivity, a centre-consol coolbox and six airbags, in case you wanted a jumping castle instead of a car.

They're trying, these Korean dudes. They really want your business. – *Ivan Smith*

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ALTERNATIVES



NISSAN X-TRAIL TS DCI

Nissan's best seller, and close in value to the Santa Fe, has excellent storage space, top-class acceleration and a generally beefy performance. **\$38,990.**



SUZUKI GRAND VITARA DDIS

The Suzuki costs less but also loses a little in class, storage room, power and acceleration. It's not quite as good looking or comfortable inside. **\$34,990.**

ON YA BIKE

CONFEDERATE C120 RENAISSANCE FIGHTER

Forged from aircraft billet aluminium, the Renaissance gives you a ride smoother than a vat of aged bourbon. Not that you'll be able to afford to drink much if you're lucky enough to snare one. **\$168,000.**



PUZEY XTR2 250 MX

The stripped-back Puzey XTR2 250 MX dirt bike is the brainchild of Zimbabwe-born Mike Puzey. It runs on a water-cooled 248cc engine with a chrome molly frame, billet aluminium components and 28mm Fat Bar handlebars. **\$4500.**



HONDA XL1000V VARADERO

Green thinking has gone into the latest Honda Varadero with its fuel efficiency and emissions performance given the once over by Honda HQ. For an extra \$1000 you can install ABS brakes. **\$17,990.**



STRAIGHT DRIVE

LOTUS EVORA

The Lotus Evora is expected to go on sale in late 2009 and the car's bullet-like styling will give most Italian sports cars a run for their money. This is the company's first four-seater, although the traditional two-seater will be available later on. **\$120,000.**



BMW 330D

The soon-to-be-released BMW 3L diesel sedan will have the power of a V8 and the fuel consumption of a four – chewing up a fish-sphincter tight 6.8L per 100km. BMW assures us it will sell for under **\$100,000**, thanks to the government's luxury car tax scheme.



FORD MUSTANG

The big changes in the 2010 Mustang are in the styling, with leather interior and slightly raised rear, but the 315 horsepower engine is not as powerful as the new Camaro. It will retail for about the same as the current Mustangs. **\$41,000.**



WACKY RACERS

CAN-AM SPYDER SES

Is it a car missing a wheel or a bike with an extra one? With an electronic five-speed transmission, power steering and stability system, the 2009 Can-Am Spyder offers a smooth, easy ride that will attract plenty of attention. **\$27,990.**



MOLLER AUTOVOLANTOR

Moller International reckons in 2010 it will have a car that not only flies but looks like a sports car on the British market. Keep in mind engineer Paul Moller has been promising a commercially viable flying car is "just around the corner" since 1974. **\$1.175 million.**



KENGURU

Designed for wheelchair users, the one-person car has a back that opens at street level. The driver then wheels in and drives without leaving the chair. As western populations age, expect to see a lot more Kengurus on the roads in future. **\$25,000.**

