

2011 Hyundai Tucson worth checking out

By Rob Beintema
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Automotive designers face a constant challenge of staying current in an ever-changing market and the Hyundai Tucson is a good example of just how to do that.

Actually, to look at what's new with the latest Tucson, we have to step back to last year's launch of the all-new 2010 model.

The second generation version went through a major redesign that shifted the Tucson from classic truck-based, two-box architecture to a sleeker, almost one-box crossover design, a modern trend that we can trace back to style predecessors like the Nissan Murano.

It's a trend that continues to

reshape classic nameplates with new body styles, even brand benchmarks like the Ford Explorer.

The Tucson is the first Hyundai CUV (Crossover Utility Vehicle) to be designed and engineered in Europe at Hyundai's Frankfurt studios and its sporty European bloodline shows. The newest Tucson, or ix35 as it's known in other markets, sticks close to the ix-onic Concept that inspired it, featuring what Hyundai refers to as "fluidic sculpture" design philosophy: a streamlined, flowing style that is highlighted by a bold Hyundai family hexagonal front grille, an aggressive lower air intake, sculptured hood creases and curvaceous angles complimented by swept back headlights and wraparound taillights.

It's quite a departure from the

original and is pleasing to the eye, but Hyundai didn't just leave it at that. They knew they had to back up style with substance.

Earlier this year, when my colleague Jim Robinson was looking for a vehicle to drive to the Detroit auto show (usually during the worst of winter weather) he had only a few demands – a relative degree of long haul comfort, fuel economy, all-wheel drive availability, good tires and enough ground clearance to get through the almost inevitable snowstorm on the way.

Jim chose a 2011 Hyundai Tucson GLS AWD, harnessing the stock Theta II 2.4-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder engine rated at 176 hp and 168 lb/ft of torque, more power than the previous generation's V6, and the Tucson delivered him safely

to Detroit.

The mid-range GL trim level and the slightly more upscale GLS model that Jim drove, cover the price point that most Canadians will play in, offering a well-loaded mix of standard equipment and niceties, with prices ranging from the mid- to high-\$20K mark.

For 2011, Hyundai increased the breadth of the lineup with a new low-priced version. The L model offers a slightly smaller, new 2.0-litre 165 hp base engine, a five-speed manual transmission and front-wheel drive only. Frankly, if you can live with a manual shifter, at \$19,999, this is the steal of the lineup.

The engine power is only slightly less than the 2.4-litre version and standard features still include six airbags, air conditioning, 60/40

split-folding rear seats, power windows, power door locks, power heated mirrors, four-wheel ABS disk brakes with Electronic Brake Distribution and Brake Assist, Downhill Brake Control, Hill Start Assist Control, Electronic Stability Control with Traction Control, rear spoiler, variable intermittent wipers, rear washer/wiper, dual vanity mirrors, tire pressure monitoring system and six-speaker AM/FM/CD/MP3/Aux/USB audio.

Ah, but even though both my heart and wallet inclinations naturally lean towards the economy end of the spectrum, my butt wound up solidly seated in the other end of the lineup, in a top-of-the-line 2011 Tucson Limited with Navigation.

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