

# AUTOMOTIVE

## Ford unveils all-terrain pickup truck

Ford is calling the 2001 Explorer Sport Trac the "Swiss Army Knife" of SUVs.

This all-new 2001 Explorer Sport Trac is the world's first vehicle to meld the best attributes of an SUV and an all-terrain pickup truck - all in one ruggedly handsome vehicle.

**JIM ROBINSON**



Road Worthy

When it goes on sale in the spring it will retail at \$28,345 for the 4X2 model and \$33,345 for the 4X4. The Sport Trac is one of the new-age four-door, pickup trucks that ladles in loads of utility and styling aimed at a younger crowd.

"This is one brawny new vehicle with the muscle for all those tough jobs and the kind of refined manners and quiet comfort that make it ideal for the daily commute or a trip to the ski hills," said Jack Turner, Ford of Canada's Brand Manager for Explorer. "Sport Trac is for people who need to haul everything from occasional building materials for a home improvement project to the odd muddy trail bike... and yet would never own a pickup truck."

Sport Trac is based on the 4-door Explorer, with the frame lengthened 362 mm (14.25 in) and made 40 per cent stiffer. Added to this potent platform is a specially tuned suspension and bigger, meatier brakes.

The added torsional stiffness - which makes the vehicle more agile on and off the road - was achieved through additional gussets on the vehicle's longitudinal beams, as well as several new tubular cross members and thicker side rail frames. Ford engineers also achieved a reduction in unwanted road and engine vibration from reaching occupants by using urethane - rather than the typical solid rubber-body mounts, another Ford first on an SUV.

Sport Trac offers a dynamic interior, not just in appearance but in quality of materials used, innovative design and overall attention to detail. Seating is designed to comfortably accommodate five adults. New front bucket seats were created specifically for Sport Trac.

For the active lifestyles of Sport Trac buyers, a removable soft pack sport bag that can carry pop, snacks or CDs and be slung over the shoulder like a duffel bag, becomes the centre floor console storage area when stowed under the hinged center armrest.

A control knob for the optional



Ford has taken its Explorer SUV and added a pickup box to create what it calls the "Swiss Army knife" of SUVs.

power rear window - another industry first - is located on the instrument panel. The window is one-touch up and down and features an anti-pinch sensor.

Standard on Sport Trac is an AM/FM stereo with a single CD player and four premium speakers. A 290-watt AM/FM stereo with a six-disc, in-dash CD player (late availability represents another industry segment first. Rear seat occupants also receive independent radio controls with two headphone jacks, two cup holders and separate rear ventilation controls.

Inside, the vehicle is again matched to active lifestyles. The vehicle's specifically designed hexagonal pattern floor covering is a washable, textured rubber, which also helps to keep the cabin quieter. Titanium accents are featured on the door handles and console.

Sport Trac's clean and purposeful, yet rugged exterior starts with an aggressive "power-dome hood" that flows into a honeycomb platinum-color grille flanked by vertical air intakes. The two-tone front bumper fascia flows into new sculptured, flared front fenders. The bumper's upper portion is color-keyed to the sheet metal with the lower portion molded in a medium titanium accent color. Integrated into openings in the bumpers are new optional fog lamps and a pair of black tow hooks (4X4 only) that accentuate Sport Trac's athletic appearance.

Available as an accessory, a step bar runs the length of the cab. The step area of the bar is covered with a skid-resistant coating for increased safety while entering or exiting the vehicle.

Standard P235/75R15 all-season radials, developed specifically for Sport Trac, are mounted on styled silver-painted steel wheels. Also available are five-spoke bright cast-aluminum 16-inch wheels shod with P255/70R16 all-terrain tires.

Ford's 4.0-litre single overhead cam (SOHC) V6 delivers 205 hp and 238 ft/lb of torque at 3,000 rpm. Redline is at 6,250 rpm. The Sport Trac's shift-on-the-fly four-wheel drive system consists of an electronic shift transfer case with

automatic locking hubs. Engaging four-wheel-drive simply requires rotating a switch on the instrument panel. There are three settings:

- 2WD for clear, dry roads enables Sport Trac to drive just like other rear-wheel drive vehicles.

- In 4WD HIGH setting, Sport Trac operates like a traditional four-wheel-drive vehicle, handling slippery surfaces at higher speeds.

- 4WD LOW dials in extra pulling power for heavy snow, deep mud or rough terrain at low speeds. This mode also enhances engine braking - particularly helpful in negotiating steep declines safely, when using the brakes could start a skid.

A limited slip rear axle is available with either a 3.73 final drive ratio or a 4.10 axle ratio. The optional system provides better traction by limiting the power differences between the two rear wheels.

All major body panels, save the roof, are fashioned from two-sided galvanized steel. Sport Trac's frame receives a new full immersion, electro-coated corrosion-resistant primer for even better rust protection.

Sport Trac's cargo box is far from just a pretty, color-coordinated add-on. It's great for handling big bulky items like refrigerators or bags of topsoil. It has tie-downs galore to keep everything secure and a weather-proof 12-volt power point just in case you need to run some power tools or shine some extra light on a job in process.

The box features 10 cargo hooks - six on the outside rail and four, steel-reinforced ones on the inside of the box - each of which can hold 317.5 kg (700 lb). A removable divider enables the box to be sectioned into two separate storage areas fore and aft for extra convenience.

Sport Trac can be ordered with a hard plastic tonneau cover, lockable with the same key used to open the vehicle. Unlike soft covers, this one can't be slashed open with a knife and is hinged transversely at the centre, enabling one half to be folded onto the other from the front or rear.



2000 Hyundai Accent

## Hyundai puts the Accent on style

By Rob Beintema  
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Sort of the same but different. I was walking around the new 2000 Hyundai Accent, trying to get a handle on the redesign of one of Canada's favorite econoboxes. The lines and overall shape were familiar but the new Accent is sharper, the design more angular, more edgy, a styling nod to the trendy New Edge philosophy that's making the rounds of automotive design houses. Bye, bye jelly bean styling.

The new, freshened look gives the Hyundai Accent an almost European flavor. A look that wouldn't seem out of place speeding along an English motorway or circling the Champs Elyses.

The bolder grille is bracketed by larger halogen headlamps. Along the sides, a shoulder line sweeps from front to rear. The rear end, with a distinctive crease over the top edge of the trunk lid, is reminiscent of Sonata, Hyundai's top end sedan.

Even more changes have been made under the skin of the all new Accent.

It's bigger. The wheelbase has been extended by 40 mm to 2440 mm and overall width is up by 50 mm to 1670mm. Hyundai engineers have also made the Accent's structure stiffer and stronger. The "A" and "B" pillars have been reinforced and stiffened with injected foam. The cowl crossbar has been strengthened to reduce steering vibration. Side sills, centre panel and roof structures have all been upgraded. The doors are now double-sealed and floor panels have been fitted with vibration absorbing material to reduce interior noise.

Inside, the stretched wheelbase translates into more interior space. More headroom, more legroom and more hip-room. A surprising amount of room. The interior dimensions compare favorably with Hyundai's bigger, upscale models. In fact, although rear seating still requires some compromise from the driver for adequate legroom, the Accent provides more rear headroom than any other Hyundai, including the top end Sonata.

The front buckets are bigger as well. High-density foam pads give firm support and the seats are comfortable, even after a full day of driving. The gauge pod and dash are simply laid out and all instruments are within easy reach. Tachometers are standard on all models.

HVAC controls are large, easy-to-use rotary dials.

Under the hood, the Accent still uses the familiar 1.5 L SOHC 12-valve 4-cylinder engine. The engine has been smoothed out and hushed, revamped with a stiffer block, better balanced crankshaft and hydraulic engine mounts, resulting in reduced vibration and less engine noise. Further refinements include a redesigned aluminum cylinder head with pentroof-style combustion chambers, a one-piece welded exhaust manifold and catalytic converter assembly and the addition of a Bosch engine management system.

Power numbers are unchanged however, at 92 hp @ 5500 rpm and 97 lb-ft of torque @ 4000 rpm. Those numbers place the Accent squarely in the middle of it's class, ahead of entry level twins, Suzuki Swift and Chevy Metro but harnessing less power than competitors like Honda Civic and new-kid-on-the-block Toyota Echo.

Yes, you can still have fun in the Accent. As much fun as I did, even in a 4-speed automatic sedan, chasing a Tiburon, with a 50 horsepower advantage under its hood, along a coastal highway and through the arroyos and winding turns of a twisty mountain road. Actually, Hyundai showed admirable courage just letting this thrasher anywhere near a mountain. Pushing up a slope at full throttle, the 1.5 L four-banger just holds it own, neither accelerating nor decelerating. A little more oomph would come in handy for a full load of passengers and cargo. But for basic commuting, the Hyundai Accent has more than enough get-up-and-go to get you around town.

And econoboxes are, after all, more about saving than speed. In that department, the Accent does not disappoint with 8.4 L/6 L/100 km (city/hwy) fuel economy ratings.

The Hyundai Accent comes in two basic configurations - 3-door hatchback or 4-door sedan.

The entry-level model is the 3-door Accent GS. Not quite a bare bones stripper, the hatchback GS offers a 5-speed manual transmission, front buckets with height-adjustable headrests, console, dual mirrors and front door map pockets. Also standard on all Accents are rear window defroster, retractable dual cupholders, variable intermittent wipers, digital clock, tachometer, tinted glass and 5-way adjustable driver's seat.

The GS starts at \$11,995. Power steering costs \$400 extra and automatic transmission is a \$750 option.

Customers can pick and choose goodies from the option list or move up a notch to the Accent GSi. The GSi adds a long list of extras like AM/FM/CD, rear washer/wiper, manual sun roof, power locks, fog lamps, and a selection of sporty enhancements that include a rear spoiler, sport suspension, alloy wheels, side sill moulding, white-faced gauges and leather wrap on the steering wheel and shifter knob. This is where a little more engine, as offered in previous versions, to match the sporty accessories, would be appreciated. The GSi 5-speed lists for \$13,995.

The most practical and, probably, most popular model choice is the Accent GL - the 4-door sedan. The GL comes complete with power steering, dual airbags, AM/FM Cassette, remote mirrors and 60/40 split folding rear seat. A \$1000 package adds automatic transmission and power windows/doors/locks/mirrors.

The GL starts at \$13,245, about two-percent more than last year's model. Hyundai will argue that works out to substantially more car for the money.

And Hyundai backs their quality claim with one of the best warranties in the biz - a limited bumper-to-bumper warranty for 3 years or 60,000 km, 5 year or 100,000 km powertrain warranty and 5 year unlimited mileage corrosion coverage. Accent owners also get no-extra-charge, 24-hr roadside assistance for 3 years or 60,000 km. That includes emergency towing, lockout service and limited coverage for trip-interruption expenses.

Accent has been Hyundai's best seller since its introduction, cornering 25% of the subcompact market. The overall fit and finish of this, the brand new Accent, its increase in size and space, the quality of materials, the ride and handling dynamics, all show steady improvement in keeping with the evolution of modern customer demand and sophistication, even at this price level.

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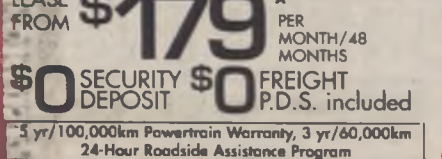


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