

The Canadian Champion

WHEELS

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Hyundai adds an 11th vehicle to the lineup

By JIM ROBINSON

Metroland Media Group

VICTORIA: According to Hyundai Canada president and CEO, Steve Kelleher, "we see 2009 as the year of opportunity for us."

Speaking at the press launch of the new Elantra Touring in Victoria, he noted 2008 saw the highest sales ever in the 25-year history of operations in this country. Hyundai sold 80,632 vehicles for an eight per cent increase. Interestingly, the second best year ever was 1985 when they sold 79,071 cars, mostly Ponies.

Kelleher says that increase in a down market augers well for this year. Sounds optimistic but he believes Hyundai has now built a track record for quality, reliability and fuel efficiency that is paying off in consumer confidence.

"I see this as like back in the '70s and '80s when people were ready to give Toyota and Honda a shot," he said. "Now I think it's our turn."

With their cup brimming over with awards like the recent North American Car of the Year Award for the Genesis luxury car, the 2009 Elantra Touring is Hyundai's 11th nameplate.

It is built in Europe and was designed in Germany to suit Euro tastes and driving habits. Sold there as the Hyundai I30, there are several versions and engines, but in North America, we will get the longer wheel base version. This is a

new platform and shares nothing with the current Elantra sedan.

Designed to compete against other five-door hatchbacks (Dodge Caliber, Toyota Matrix/Pontiac Vibe and Mazda3 Sportback), the Touring is the same width as the Matrix but visually longer. With segments now blurred beyond my comprehension, the Elantra Touring is officially a compact hatch, but its size and height make it more like a mid-size station wagon.

There is one engine for North

America, a 2.0-litre, twincam four-cylinder producing 138 hp and 136 lb/ft of torque driving the front wheels. A five-speed manual transmission is standard and a four-speed automatic is a \$1,200 option. Fuel consumption is rated at 8.9/6.4L/100 km city/highway for the manual and 8.7/6.5L/100 km city/highway for the automatic.

While there are several exterior colours, the interior is typically German influenced in black on black. But, the days of rock-hard plastic trim are long-gone at

Hyundai. Soft touch materials are in as is the blue instrument illumination first seen on the Santa Fe and now a Hyundai signature design element.

The seats are wide and long for we larger North Americans. In fact, there is 12 inches more front legroom than the Matrix/Vibe.

I did not drive the manual, but the automatic is vice-free. The engine at just 2.0-litres has its work cut out for it at our highway speeds, but the 138 horses were all

there when merging onto Vancouver Island's Malahat Highway which snakes around the foot of mountains and is loaded with dump trucks that make no effort to slow down and let anybody in.

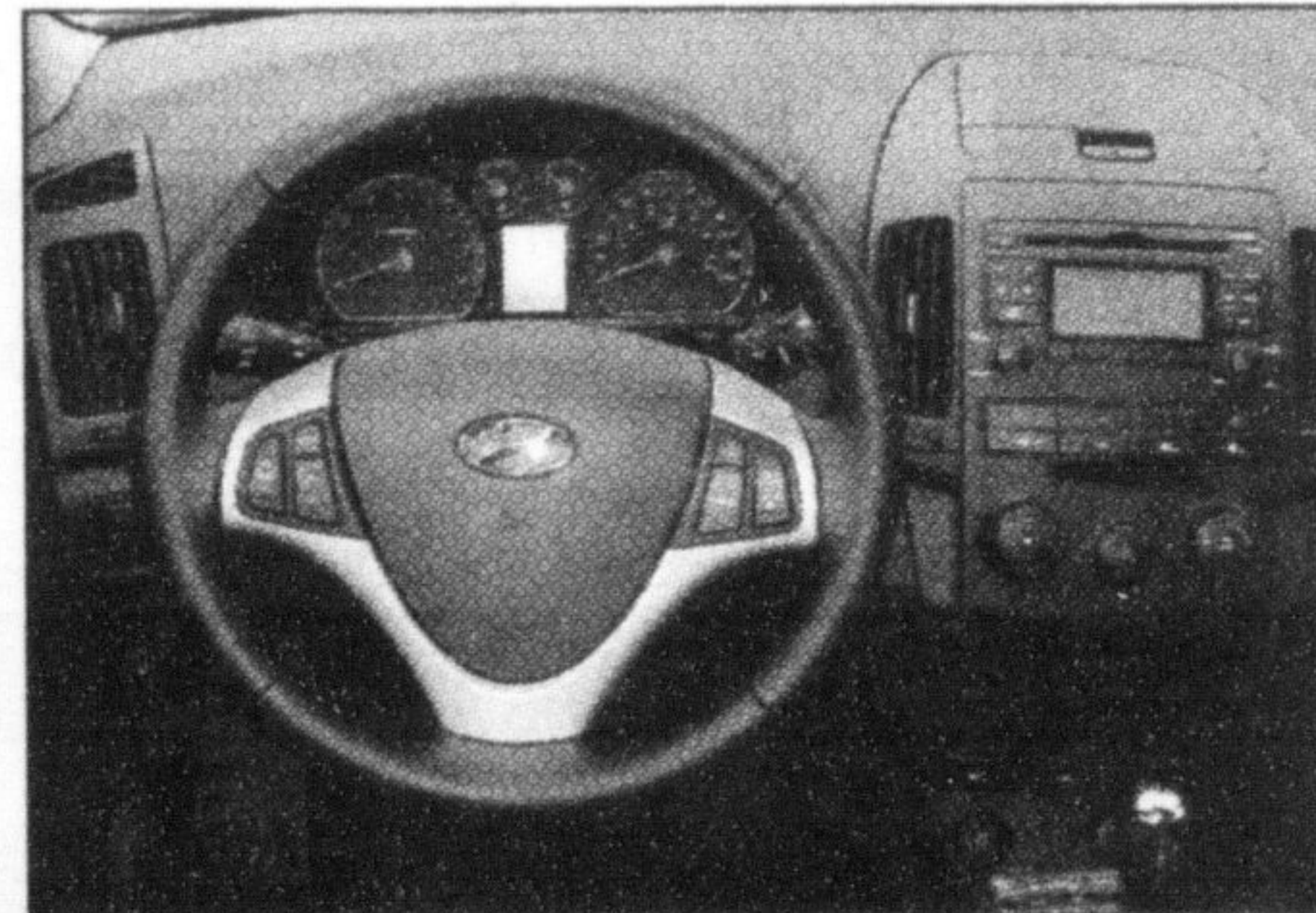
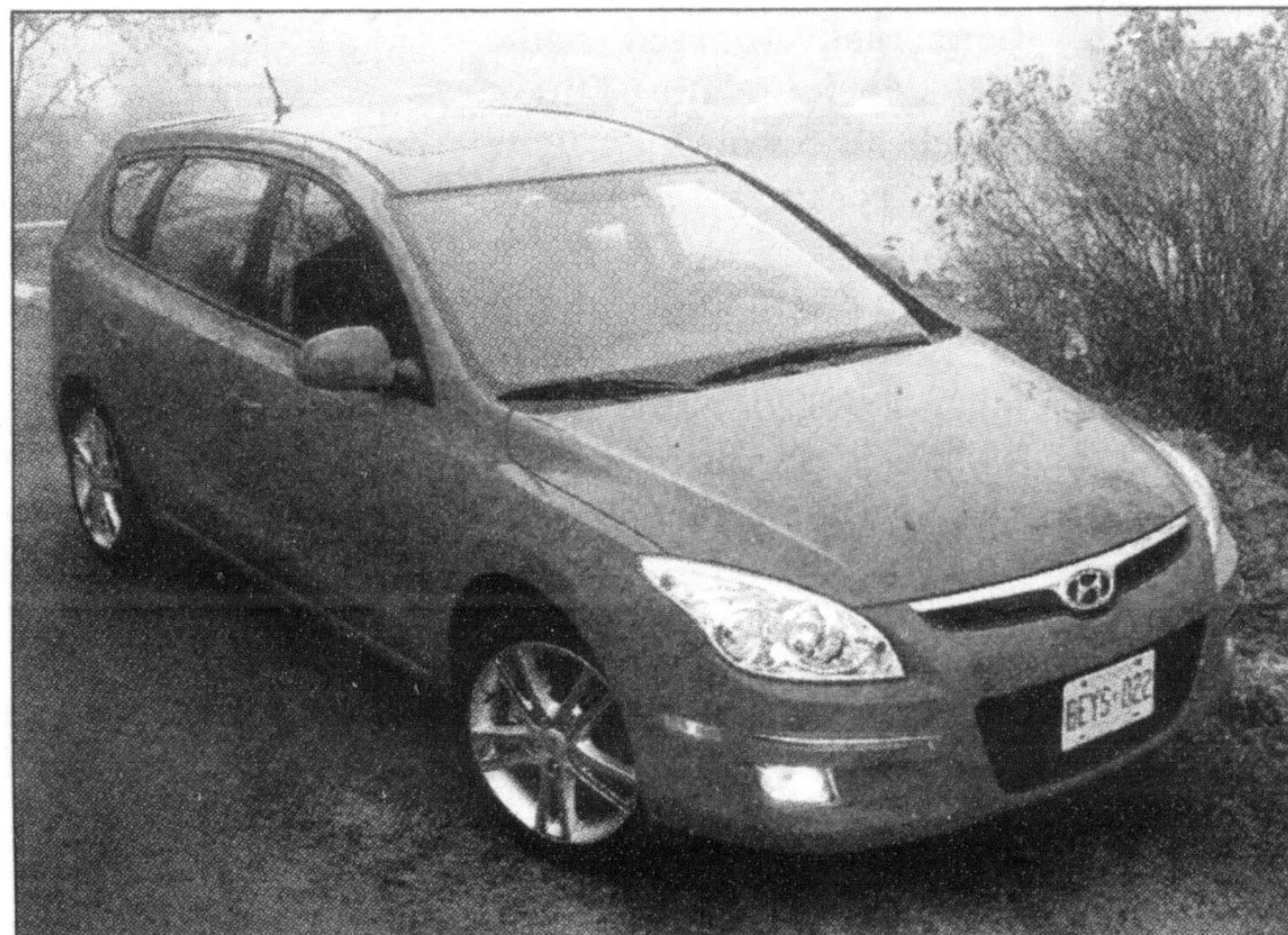
The Touring had no trouble in this regard, but I was driving alone and not weighted down by a car-load of passengers. But with 136 lb/ft of torque, there's plenty of traction for most situations.

One thing the Touring has is passenger and cargo space. With the front seat all the way back, getting in the back did not require any contortions with adequate legroom with seating for five being more fact than sales brochure fiction.

With the 60/40 split-fold upright there is 689 litres of cargo space. Fully folded, this balloons to 1,848 litres or 65.3 cu ft which Hyundai claims exceeds that of vehicles like the Mazda7, Jeep Patriot and Nissan Murano.

But to give that a real world perspective, Hyundai, while in Victoria, made a donation to Habitat for Humanity. As part of their commitment, Hyundai invited journalists to load up a Touring with building materials and ferry them to a site in Victoria. The Tourings took two, large bales of insulation and boxes of fasteners and wood trim in stride and proved just how commodious the cargo area was.

• see THEY on page A34



LEFT: The 2009 Elantra Touring five-door expands Hyundai's lineup to 11 models. It was designed in Europe for driving conditions there and that translates in crisp handling.

TOP RIGHT: The interior shows its Euro design influences being finishing in charcoal. Gauges (now with Hyundai signature blue illumination) are, however, large and easy to use, as are the secondary controls.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The 2009 Elantra Touring boasts 1,848 litres (65.3 cu ft) of cargo space. With the rear 60-40 seat folded flat, there was enough for a load of construction materials shown here destined for a Habitat for Humanity building site in Victoria

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