

Luxury and sophistication in a value-rich package



The front-wheel drive Diamante comes in three trim levels, ES, LS and VR-X. The ES comes standard with automatic climate control, a power glass sliding sunroof, keyless entry system with trunk release, fog lights, six-speaker AM/FM stereo CD player, cruise control, 16-inch alloy wheels, power windows, locks and side view mirrors.



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From first page

Outlander, Montero Sport and Montero models.

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Our tester was the LS, which offers leather seats, Sportronic transmission, 14-way (10-way power)

adjustable power driver's seat with position memory, 12-way (8-way power) adjustable passenger seat, electro-luminescent gauges, steering wheel-mounted audio controls and leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob. A premium 270-watt Mitsubishi/Infinity AM/FM/CD eight-speaker sound system is also standard on the LS model.

For those seeking a more sporty package, the VR-X features a 210-horsepower 3.5-litre V6 with four-speed Sportronic transmission and a tuned suspension. On the outside, the VR-X is dressed up with side skirts, a rear spoiler and wheel arch flares. There is also a black mesh

grille with fog lights and a colour-keyed rear taillight trim pieces and chrome exhaust tip. Inside, you'll find sportier gauges, sport-styled bucket seats with black sports fabric (or optional leather) and a power glass sunroof.

Standard engine in the Diamante is a 205-horsepower 3.5-litre V6, which provides adequate power and is quiet at cruising speeds.

Inside, the cabin of the Diamante is both roomy and quiet, just what one would expect in a near-luxury sedan. Seating is comfortable with lots of leg room, both front and back. Controls are easy to reach and easy to use. The

center-stack and console have been redesigned for 2004 for that very reason. However, the faux woodtrim that surrounds them is a bit garish for my liking.

One complaint I have relates to the size of storage pockets on the doors. They are so tiny that they barely hold a pair of sunglasses let alone a map book.

Another drawback is the lack of a split, fold down rear seat. There is a center pass-through from the trunk into the passenger area, but a split folding rear seat would definitely be on the wish list for many consumers - even this oldtimer hockey player who has to throw his sticks and hockey bag into the trunk!

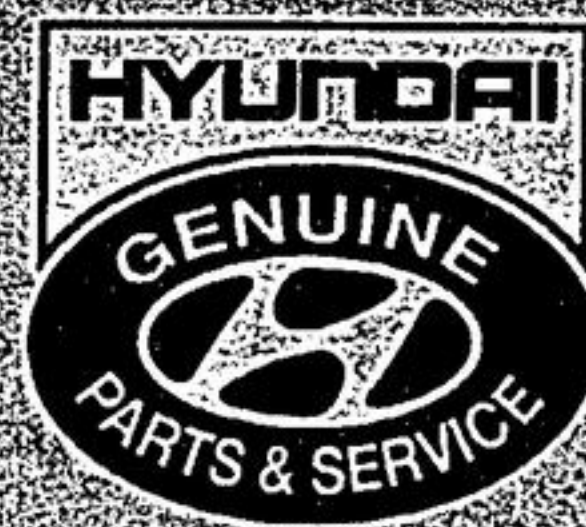
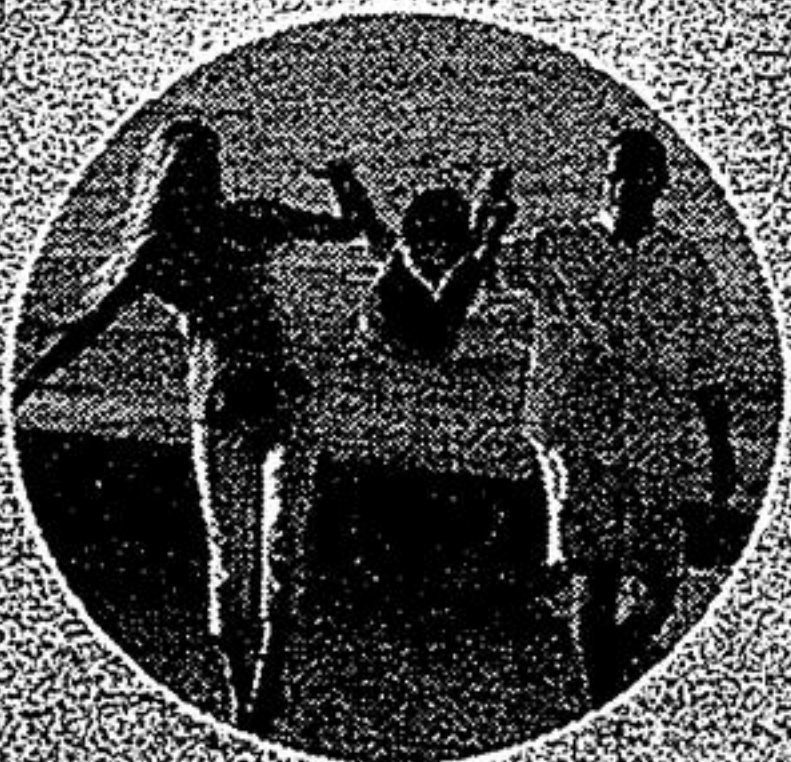
Otherwise, the interior has all the bells and whistles one would expect on a near-luxury car, such as automatic climate control, heated power side mirrors, one touch power sunroof, steering wheel audio controls and rear seat armrest with dual cup holders.

While far from the most powerful car in its class, the Diamante has enough get-up-and-go to smoothly and easily merge into high-speed traffic or to safely overtake slower moving traffic when needed.

The ride in the Diamante is smooth and quiet thanks in part to four wheel independent suspension and braking is excellent with discs all round and anti-lock brakes standard on all trim levels.

Although this particular model has been around for a long time (and there are rumours that a new version based on the Galant's Project America platform is in the works), the Diamante is worth a look for anyone in the market for an affordably priced upmarket sedan.

Prices start at \$31,998 for the ES version. The LS will set you back \$36,198 and the VR-X starts at \$35,598.



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