



MEDIUM, WELL DONE

THERE ARE SOME ATTRACTIVE OFFERINGS IN THE MID-SIZE CAR CLASS. WE GIVE TWO TURBO-CHARGED PETROL MODELS A GRILLING.

THE RISE AND rise of SUVs, small cars and dual-cab utes in the sales charts over recent years has certainly impacted other market segments, including medium-size cars.

Sales of medium cars may be rarer, but many of the vehicles in this class are very well done – think Kia Optima, Ford Mondeo, Subaru Liberty, the new Toyota Camry, just to name a few. So, it's a pity

a lot of buyers have ignored them. They can offer a spacious interior in a body that's more compact than traditional large sedans. And their value, functionality and generally sophisticated on-road performance add appeal.

Here, we put two medium sedan offerings to the test to see if they are underdone, over-cooked or just right. On our tasting plates – the Hyundai Sonata

Premium, updated late last year, and the new Mazda6 in GT specification.

Mazda gave the 6 a major update soon after the Australia's Best Cars final test week in May, so sadly the new model couldn't be evaluated by ABC.

This twin-test is our first opportunity to put the latest version back-to-back against a competitor.

Let's see whose kitchen rules...



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STARTERS HYUNDAI SONATA 2.0T PREMIUM, MAZDA6 GT 2.5T

VALUE FOR MONEY

The Mazda takes a financial lead early, with a list price \$1500 lower than the Hyundai. Retained value after five years/75,000km also looks superior for the Mazda, holding up at 40.8 percent, versus 32.4 percent for the Sonata.

Both cars are scheduled for servicing at 10,000km or 12 months (whichever occurs first) intervals. Sonata owners will be marginally better off with total basic dealer service costs to five years/50,000km totalling \$1455, where the Mazda6 will total \$1618 over the same time/distance.

Hyundai lands a more telling blow on the Mazda when warranties are compared. The Sonata's cover runs to five years, two years more generous than the Mazda, though both provide unlimited kilometre coverage within the nominated time.

Owners of the Mazda6 will be shelling out around \$80 more annually for comprehensive insurance premiums too.

But the Mazda counters with ongoing savings at the fuel bowser compared to the thirstier Sonata. The official ADR



combined cycle consumptions are 7.6 litres/100km and 8.5 litres/100km respectively. Our average consumption figures, logged over 550km of varying road types and driven harder than most owners are likely to, showed a similar relativity at 10.27 litres/100km (Sonata) and 9.48 litres/100km (Mazda6). Both are tuned to accept 91RON ULP.

The Premium is the top-specification version in the current two-model line-up. The Mazda 6 GT for its part, sits one rung under the flagship Atenza in a four-specification range. Befitting their status, both offer a healthy level of standard features and safety tech, too extensive to list here.

There are points of difference over and above their equipment commonality worth

noting though. 'Extras' on the Hyundai not fitted to the GT include a sunroof, 'smart' handsfree boot opening, rear side-window sunshades, anti-theft alarm, heated/cooled front seats, AppleCar Play and Android Auto.

The GT counters with a more comprehensive and smarter suite of driver-assistance safety technology which, in our opinion, trumps the Sonata's 'extras' and driver-assistance features that still don't include autonomous emergency braking (AEB). The Mazda adds adaptive front lighting, forward obstruction warning, intelligent speed assist, radar cruise control with stop-go function, lane-keep assist, high-beam control, traffic-sign recognition and the full Smart City Brake Support suite (a smarter form of AEB). The 6 also gets heated front and rear-outer seats, DAB+ radio and a premium Bose 231W audio system.

The Hyundai's full-size alloy spare-wheel gets a tick of approval, unlike the Mazda's spacesaver and its spare-wheel well that looks too small to accept the normal wheel and tyre.





DESIGN & FUNCTION

Mazda6 and Sonata both score five-stars in ANCAP crash testing and meet Euro 5 exhaust emissions standards. CO₂ emissions are lower from the Mazda – 184g/km to the Sonata’s 198g/km.

Occupant space in both vehicles is fairly generous and, as our standard set of measurements (leg, head, width, cushion length and front seat travel) shows, neither car has a major advantage across the board. It swings both ways, with any variations car-to-car never exceeding 25mm. The centre rear floor ‘hump’ in the Hyundai is a little less intrusive than the Mazda’s. You’ll find three child-restraint points and ISOFIX (outer rears) in both cars.

Both have good-sized boots with volumes quoted at 474 litres (Mazda) and 510 litres (Hyundai). The ‘gooseneck’ style hinges intrude into cargo space in both, though the Mazda’s are covered by the side trims. Where the Sonata provides two boot cargo tie-points, the Mazda has none. The Mazda’s split rear seat folds flat with the boot floor, where the Hyundai leaves a vertical ‘step’.

Oddments storage is acceptable in both cars, and we like the Hyundai’s cordless phone-charging pad in the console.

Seats in both test cars proved comfortable, though testers agreed that front and rear pews in the Mazda were slightly superior for support, shaping and overall comfort. Both cars offered good adjustability of front seats, including two-way lumbar for the driver in the Mazda. The Sonata includes four-way lumbar for driver and two-way for the front passenger.

Our dynamic duo have user-friendly and thoughtfully laid out cabins. The Mazda again showed the way though, with an easier to use infotainment system, voice control and near-perfect positioning of control stalks. It also has a head-up display projecting information onto the lower windscreen in front of the driver, including vehicle speed, turn-by-turn navigation instruction, blind-spot warnings and speed/traffic-sign recognition information.

COSTS + RATINGS

HYUNDAI SONATA PREMIUM



Price	\$45,490[^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	5yr/unlimited km
Capped price servicing	\$291 (average per service, 5 yrs/50,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$767.49^{^^}
Retained value	32.4%^{^^^}

MAZDA 6 GT



Price	\$43,990[^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	3yr/unlimited km
Capped price servicing	\$324 (average per service, 5yrs/50,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$847.38^{^^}
Retained value	40.8%^{^^^}

Build and finish on both is good, though the Mazda’s interior has a more premium look and feel, with many more soft-touch trims and surfaces.

ON THE ROAD

The Premium’s 2.0-litre turbo engine delivers strong performance and covers the 0 – 100km/h sprint in a claimed 7.5 seconds. Power delivery, however, is more aggressive, lacking the linear nature of the Mazda GT’s new 2.5-litre turbo powerplant as used in CX9. Sonata’s rush of power is more likely to overwhelm the front wheels’ grip and produce considerably more torque-steer than the Mazda.

Despite carrying an extra 41kg of kerb mass and being 10kW shy of the Hyundai’s power output, the Mazda claims a 0.5 second advantage to 100km/h. It makes good use of its 420Nm of torque, 67Nm more than the Sonata, for excellent drivability.

The eight-speed auto in the Hyundai is good, but shifts feel a little bumpier at times than the Mazda’s slick six-speed unit.

Mazda’s greater refinement showed through in its firm-but-comfy and controlled ride. The Sonata, by comparison, transmitted rough surfaces through to cabin occupants more. The

[^] PRICES ARE MANUFACTURER’S LIST PRICES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED AND DO NOT INCLUDE STATUTORY AND DELIVERY CHARGES. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINTING.

^{^^} BASED ON RACQ INSURANCE COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR 30-YEAR-OLD MALE, 10-YEAR DRIVER EXCELLENCE BONUS, RATING 1 FOR LIFE, NO CLAIMS, GARAGED AVERAGE RISK POSTCODE, \$650 STANDARD EXCESS, PRIVATE USE, NO UNDER-25 DRIVERS, VEHICLE FINANCIALLY ENCUMBERED, RACQ FINANCE, MARKET-VALUE COVER, BLUE MEMBERSHIP.

^{^^^} AFTER 5YR/75,000KM (GLASS’S GUIDE)

rear also became unsettled at times due to underdone rebound control.

Steering and handling honours go to the GT too. Through twists and turns its greater dynamic sophistication shows, feeling responsive and better balanced. It's almost unflappable and reassuringly capable. Its lighter steering is more linear than the Sonata's too.

Brakes in both cars are efficient, though testers agreed the Mazda's brakes were a little more progressive than the Sonata's.

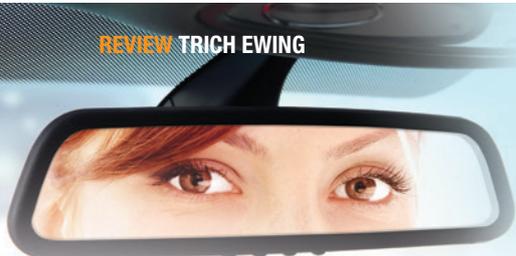
Mazda's superior refinement shows in the NVH (noise, vibration and harshness) department. In the Sonata, tyre and road noise is more intrusive, there's obvious turbo-whistle and engine NVH isn't quite as well controlled.

CONCLUSION

No real prizes for guessing by now that the winner of this taste-test is the new Mazda6. The Sonata, for its part, is a decent offering and makes a sound argument for consideration. But beside the Mazda it looks a touch underdone, with the Mazda making its case better in terms of value for money, design and function, and superior on-road sophistication. The latest update to the Mazda6 has added polish to one of the class benchmarks and made it shine even brighter. ■



REVIEW TRICH EWING



ANOTHER SET OF EYES...

HOW TO DESCRIBE these two cars? In textile terms, 'silk' and 'homespun' comes to mind. The silky smoothness and refinement of the Mazda6 opposing the relative harshness of the Hyundai Sonata.

Being a vertically-challenged female, setting up my driving position can make me love or hate a car within minutes if I can't get it 'just so'. With the aid of electric seat adjustments, which I love because they allow finer adjustment, even on the move, I managed to accomplish this in both. Both cars have two driver's seat memory settings too, a boon for multiple drivers. Seats are well-shaped, comfortable and heated. Sonata has a bonus of cooled fronts and Mazda heated outer rears. I found the Mazda's suited me best though.

For me, pairing the phone without

needing to use a manual is a must. The Mazda was easy and quick while the Hyundai was slower and took two goes before it connected; happily, neither needed the book.

There is plenty of room inside both cars and, with my close seating position, the Hyundai's easy-access feature moving the seat back on exit was most welcome. A minus for the '6' was knocking my knee on the steering column sometimes moving from accelerator to brake and no space to swing the sunvisor past my head.

Oddment storage is well catered for, but I did find the very narrow door pockets of the Hyundai disappointing. To its credit though, it has a cordless phone-charging pad. There's not much between



HOW TO DESCRIBE THESE TWO CARS? IN TEXTILE TERMS, 'SILK' AND 'HOMESPUN' COMES TO MIND.

the two for boot space with both having generous proportions.

On the road the Mazda6 is a pleasure to drive with smoothness the key word. Suspension soaks up varying road surfaces and those annoying shopping centre speed bumps brilliantly. I did like the head-up display on the Mazda which shows speed limits including school zones, blind spot monitoring and brake distance warning. It even shows turn-by-turn navigation right in front of you – brilliant! I found the Sonata generally harsher in ride and noisier with some vibration through the steering wheel, but still a good drive.

Where would I spend my money? On the Mazda6. ■