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Hyundai's new i30

the Korean answer to Germany's best seller...



Have you ever wondered what a good substitute for a VW Golf would be? Ford Focus maybe? Opel Astra perhaps? The Honda Civic even? What about a Renault Megane or a Peugeot 308? But a Hyundai?? I can't say I ever have.

There is of course a very good reason for this. Quite simply Hyundai build rubbish cars, and have done so for many years.

There have admittedly been improvements too, and somehow (a mystery still to us all) the Elantra managed to win SA Car of the Year in 2011. But that is like trying to fix burned eggs by adding Tabasco sauce; it doesn't change the inescapable fact that their cars are horrible.

In the Hyundai range you have the very small and quite tragic i10, then there is the Grand i10, which is anything but and then there is the i20, which is just more of the i10 misery in a bigger body. The Accent we all know is the worst handling car of all time and the Creta... what a name, is all I have to say. Then there is the i30, the Elantra, the three door Veloster which is a perfect example of an ingenious solution to a problem that should never exist in the first place, and so the list goes on.

And unfortunately none of them are really that nice and definitely not desirable. Until now that is, albeit a decade after the first i30 assaulted our streets.

When I heard that Hyundai had a new i30 - a direct competitor with the VW Golf I though, oh no here we go again... but then I saw the thing and was rather surprised... so I decided that it needed some testing to see what it was all about.

Now when I say that this is a "new" car I must point out that not all of it is new. The platform on which it is based is not

new but is rather a reworked version of the second generation i30 (this new one being the third).

The body on the other hand is new and as a result the look is a million times better than that of the old one, and to be brutally honest it is probably the best looking car in the entire product line-up. The KIA - Hyundai designer, Peter Schreyer has finally got it right! Its flowing lines and contrasting sharp angles are well placed and properly proportioned. One only needs to reflect to the original Sonata as a lesson of what not to do in this department.

The price of the range is between R 339 900 and R 356 900, which places it squarely in the mid-range VW Golf marketplace.

Now the Golf mk. 7 is a good car. There is no denying that, but what is somewhat troubling about the Golf's design is that the changes between generations is never that marked, especially in recent times... the Golf 6 and Golf 7 are basically the same shape



and design cues from even the Golf 5 are found in it.

Not so with the i30. Now I do understand that radical change can end badly, but this is equally so if the change is not radical enough. There has to be balance.

The i30 does bear some similarity, in some areas, to some of the current KIA line-up, but as they share one designer this is expected, I suppose.

The interior is nice and all the controls are nicely laid out. Central to the dashboard is a large screen on which all your multimedia stuff is displayed and the car comes standard with all the things you would expect in a slightly more expensive car... and NOT in a car this price. This has always been the Korean's strength - high specification. In this regard the car does stand out above its competitors.

In the current line-up are only a few models, and the "Tourer" which is shown in the photos is not available here (at the moment). This is a slightly longer version, sort of a small estate, which in my view actually would be the best of the bunch to buy.. if it were here. Hopefully Hyundai addresses this because there are very few estate cars on the SA market, and this would then definitely place it well ahead of its competitors.

To conclude; the i30 is a good car. Pleasant on the eye, easy to operate and fun to drive. The handling is decent enough and the engines, whilst not being massively powerful are sufficient to do the job at hand.

You get what you pay for... and in some ways with this car you get quite a bit more.

So... keep an open mind and if you are in the market for a hatchback and don't want the Golf then give the underdog a fair chance. I would.

