

# four-door sedan showroom showdown

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STARTERS: HYUNDAI ELANTRA ELITE, KIA  
CERATO SI, MAZDA3 TOURING, TOYOTA  
COROLLA SX.



CUTTING DOWN  
ON CAR THEFT



SUPERCARS  
ON TRACK



WHEN IT COMES to the mantle of Australia's most popular car, it's a two-horse race between the old 'un, Toyota Corolla, and the relative newcomer, Mazda3.

These are cars truly relevant to the 21st century, bristling with style, safety, useful technology and delivering impressive fuel economy and low emissions without compromising driveability. Perhaps little wonder the pair has usurped Holden Commodore and Ford Falcon at the top of the sales charts.

Last year, Toyota released the hatchback of its new generation Corolla. Mazda responded by launching the complete range – hatch and sedan – of its new generation '3' in January. With Corolla sedan now also landed, a comparison between the two arch-rivals proved as inevitable as it was irresistible.

But, we thought it appropriate to add another couple of worthy starters, to add quantity to our quality small car field. A big hand, then, for Hyundai's Elantra and Kia's Cerato.

First, though, let's look at the form of the short-priced favourites saddled up in mid-spec (as opposed to entry-level or high-end variants of their respective model ranges).

Corolla SX, with seven-speed CVT, is quick out of the starter's gate with a price tag of \$25,240, some \$2250 lower than the six-speed auto-quipped Mazda3 Touring. But, the latter pulls back ground in the value for money stakes by having a better *Glass's Guide* forecast residual of 42 percent (Corolla 38) after five years/70,000km. It also offers a longer kilometre coverage to its warranty (both three year, but unlimited as opposed to 100,000km).

Insurance costs are within \$20 of one another and the pair boasts a well-equipped standard equipment inventory that includes ABS, DFSCA (Corolla also has DKA), EBD, BA, ESC, TC, reversing camera and height-adjustable front seatbelts with load limiter and pretensioner. Both earn a five star ANCAP safety rating, the best there is.

Tick also 16AW, steering reach/tilt adjustment, CC, voice activation, information display, radio/CD player with MP3 and bluetooth connectivity, auxiliary input and USB and power mirrors and windows.

Mazda3 Touring comes with ACCD rather than standard

aircon, NAV, lumbar support for the driver and RSW, though the spare is a spacesaver, not full-size as on Corolla (and the two Koreans).

The Mazda claims the better ADR combined fuel economy figure of 5.7 litres/100km, 0.9 lower than the Toyota, but on test both averaged a still impressive 7.5. Environmentally, each attracts a 4.5 star (out of five) *Green Vehicle Guide* rating.

Even at a cursory glance, it's evident that new Mazda3 and Corolla have been enhanced by the styling wand. Both interiors are well presented and comfortable places to be, though the Mazda features leather trim in a tasteful, unpretentious two-tone while the Toyota is garbed in a more conservative, tight-weave cloth.

By our measurements, Corolla has more head height for the driver, though there's longer leg room behind the wheel in Mazda3. The latter's back seat passengers stand to enjoy better head space and rear seat width, but the former is more accommodating by way of leg room. Toyota wins the space race in boot size – 470 litres to 408.

Mazda3, with its 114kW/200Nm 2.0-litre SKYACTIV-G engine, enjoys a power and torque advantage over the smaller (1.8-litre, 103kW/173Nm) Corolla. And this shows, not so much in everyday driveability around town, but when you need to put the foot down – such as when overtaking. The Mazda proved the fastest in all but one of our six acceleration tests, by margins of between 0.5 and 1.0 second.

It doesn't stop there ... drive the Mazda3 over a number of days over a diversity of roads and conditions and one thing is vividly clear – the Touring is *the* most dynamic package. Even when given a torrid workout, the steering feels crisp and linear in the way it's weighted, there's grip aplenty and an absence of body roll. Paddle shifters, to manually change gears, add to the relatively sporty drive impression.

There's no vice to the way Corolla steers, handles and stops (it pulls up from 80km/h-stop in 23.5m, second only to Cerato), but it impresses more for other things such as a soft, comfortable ride and well-suppressed NVH levels. Our noise meter readings confirmed it as the quietest at idle and a constant 80km/h and equal quietest with the Kia from 50-80km/h.



ABBREVIATIONS: ABS (anti-lock brakes), AC (airconditioning), ACC (climate-control airconditioning), ACCD (dual-zone climate-control), AL (anti-theft alarm), ASS (auto stop-start), AW (alloy wheel and size in inches), BA (brake assist), CC (cruise control), DFSCA (dual front/front side/curtain airbags), DKA (driver's knee airbag), EBD (electronic brakeforce distribution), ESC (electronic stability control), HDC (hill descent control), HFS (heated front seats), HSA (hill start assist), KE (keyless entry), LT (leather trim), MLP (Manufacturer's List Price), NAV (satellite navigation), PS (parking sensors), RC (reversing camera), RSW (rain-sensing wipers), SBPT (seat belt pre-tensioner), TC (traction control).



## COSTS & RATINGS



**HYUNDAI ELANTRA ACTIVE**

Price<sup>^</sup> \$26,840<sup>^</sup>  
 Environmental rating ★★★★★  
 ANCAP safety rating ★★★★★  
 Capped price servicing \$219 (per service) For 15/30/45,000km  
 Annual insurance costs<sup>^^</sup> \$880.97



**KIA CERATO SI**

Price<sup>^</sup> \$25,990<sup>^</sup>  
 Environmental rating ★★★★★  
 ANCAP safety rating ★★★★★  
 Capped price servicing \$349 average (1yr/15,000km services) over 5yrs/75,000km  
 Annual insurance costs<sup>^^</sup> \$898.60



**MAZDA3 TOURING**

Price<sup>^</sup> \$27,490<sup>^</sup>  
 Environmental rating ★★★★★  
 ANCAP safety rating ★★★★★  
 Capped price servicing \$290-316 (10,000km service) for life of vehicle  
 Annual insurance costs<sup>^^</sup> \$953.59



**TOYOTA COROLLA SX**

Price<sup>^</sup> \$25,240<sup>^</sup>  
 Environmental rating ★★★★★  
 ANCAP safety rating ★★★★★  
 Capped price servicing \$130 (max. per service) for 3 yrs/60,000km  
 Annual insurance costs<sup>^^</sup> \$972.66

Both cars have smooth, well-calibrated transmissions. Working in unison with a torque converter, the Toyota's CVT is one of the most impressive Continuously Variable Transmissions we have driven, to the point where it could nearly be confused with a conventional auto. And Mazda's six-speed auto is one of the best going.

So that's new Mazda3 and Corolla, what about our other starters – Elantra Active and Cerato Si?

Both are similarly well-equipped as the Japanese pair, have a five-star safety rating, share a common platform of McPherson strut (front) and coupled torsion beam (rear) and drive through the front wheels.

Elantra Series II brought with it a refresh: some minor styling changes, a revised interior, more standard equipment and re-engineered suspension and steering. Unlike its competition in this comparison, Elantra is available in sedan only, as Hyundai markets its small hatch as the well-regarded i30.

Crunch the numbers across the 20 broad criteria that we use in our road testing and 'third' comes up consistently in evaluating the Elantra Active.

It's third best on price positioning, highest power and engine torque outputs (110kW/178Nm) fuel consumption – both ADR combined (7.1 litres/100km) and average on test (8.4) – GVG star rating (3.5) and for practicality. And, in our acceleration tests, it finished behind the bigger (2.0-litre) Mazda3 and Cerato, but ahead of the similar-sized (1.8-litre) Corolla.

However, for value for money, Hyundai is always at the pointy end and Elantra is no exception. It boasts equal best warranty of five year/unlimited km (with Kia), equal best *Glass's Guide* residual figure of 42 percent (with Mazda) and attracts the cheapest insurance.

Like Mazda3 Touring, its 'extras' include DCCA, NAV (with 7" touch screen) and RSW.

The interior is comfortable and roomy and, at 485 litres, the Hyundai can claim the biggest boot.

The heaviest on test at 1309kg, it rides and handles competently, rather than challenges for best-in-class. Elantra

“Crunch the numbers across the 20 broad criteria that we use in our road testing and the word 'third' comes up consistently in evaluating the Elantra Active...”

took the longest distance to stop from 80km/h (24.2m), but produced the quietest noise reading at a constant 80km/h.

With 129kW/209Nm under its bonnet, Cerato Si is the most powerful and torquy of our gathering. Add that to the lowest weight (1244kg) to carry and little wonder it feels lively and responsive.

The Kia proved a match for Mazda3 from 0-80km/h and was just one-tenth of a second slower from 0-60 and over the standing 400m. It stopped as well as it went, topping our 80km/h-stop brake test in an impressive 22.9m.

Handling and ride-wise, it's a more dynamic drive than its kindred cousin, Elantra, though not as good as the Mazda. Good quality tyres no doubt help its cause. Like the Hyundai, Cerato comes with FlexSteer which offers the choice of three modes (Comfort, Normal and Sport). FlexSteer weights the steering accordingly – lighter for manoeuvring around town; heavier for stable turn-in at speed through corners – and works well though it's not a game changer.

The six-speed automatic that can be optioned with Elantra and Cerato is a smooth shifter. The mapping is intelligently set to keep the engine spinning in the sweet spot of its torque curve when you need to power on, and it also kicks down readily without drama.

Second cheapest at just \$750 more than the Corolla and nearly a match for the Toyota by way of practicality, the Kia shares equal best warranty with the Hyundai, though its anticipated *Glass's Guide* residual (40 percent) is not quite as sharp. And, yes, it and the Hyundai also come with capped price servicing (see table).

Like Corolla, it lacks dual climate-control and sat nav, though 'extras' include front/rear fog lamps, headed/folding external mirrors and aircon vents for rear passengers.

It sips more ULP than the others (7.4 litres/100km ADR, 8.5 on test) but has the equal lowest (with Elantra) GVG 3.5 star rating.

### CONCLUSION

The small car segment is one of the most popular on the Australian motoring landscape. And, in this comparison, we've experienced among the best of the best.

The Hyundai and Kia should be on any serious buyer's list for consideration, particularly if all-round value is what drives you. That said, from what we have seen, the sales battle will remain between Mazda and Toyota.

The latest generation Mazda3 and Corolla both do justice to their respected nameplates, being well-engineered and more practical, efficient, user-friendly and a better ownership proposition than ever before.

Which is better? For us, it's Mazda3.

<sup>^</sup> Prices are Manufacturers' List Prices, not driveaway or special deal.

<sup>^^</sup> Insurance cost is based on an RACQ Insurance comprehensive policy for a 35-year-old male, maximum no claim bonus, vehicle financially unencumbered, and \$600 excess. Postcode 4066, multi-policy and RACQ member loyalty discounts may apply. Discounts of 2.5-15 percent may be available to RACQ members, depending on length of membership.