generation z of a long line

MID-SIZED SEDANS FROM HYUNDAI AND SUBARU OFFER IMPROVED OPTIONS IN AN OVERCROWDED SEGMENT.

THE MID-SIZED, or medium, new car segment in Australia is tough going for all but Toyota. The Camry consistently accounts for about half of all sales, leaving other players to fight over the remainder.

The segment’s sales are falling as Australians continue to romance SUVs, but that hasn’t stopped Hyundai and Subaru from recently releasing new models into this space.

The former’s all-new seventh generation Sonata marks the return of Hyundai Australia’s longest-serving nameplate, after a five-year hiatus, in place of the fairly anonymous i45.

Available in three equipment levels, the Sonata is powered by Hyundai’s naturally aspirated 2.4-litre (Active $29,990) and turbocharged 2.0-litre GDi Theta II petrol engines (Elite $36,990 and Premium $41,990). Both engines are matched to an advanced six-speed automatic with lock-up torque converter and sequential manual shift mode.

Hyundai points to the new Sonata benefiting from an extensive program by the company’s Australian suspension-tuning engineers to meet the unique demands of ride, handling and NVH levels over local roads.

Subaru’s new sixth generation Liberty brings with it price cuts of between $3000 and $14,000 and up to $3000 added value over the outgoing models. The all-petrol range includes the 2.5i ($29,990), 2.5i Premium ($35,490) and 3.6R ($41,990), all with CVT.

Fuel consumption on 2.5-litre variants has been boosted by 7.6 percent, thanks in part to the introduction of Auto Stop/Start and improved aerodynamics. Infotainment, boot space and NVH levels have all also been improved, according to the maker. Along with the new Outback, the Liberty is the safest Subaru produced, achieving a five-star ANCAP rating with 35.99 out of a maximum possible 37 points.

Our test cars were the mid-spec Elite and 2.5i Premium, which unfortunately put the Subaru at a sizeable power and torque disadvantage. It showed. The Sonata proved conclusively quicker in all six of our acceleration tests, although the Liberty pulled up 0.6m shorter from 80km/h.

The Hyundai’s 2.0-litre turbo engine does its best work down low, thanks to a hefty 350Nm of torque flowing from 1400 through to 4000rpm. Said ‘oomph’ comes at a cost, with the Sonata imbibing ULP on test at the rate of 10.9 litres/100km compared to the Subaru’s 10.2. That said, consumption was closer to its ADR combined average of 9.2, as opposed to the Liberty’s 7.3.

The Korean car’s electric steering weights up nicely at speed and is sharper than the Liberty’s, though the Sonata is not as adept at changing direction on a curving back road. But it remains composed at all times and the ride quality, overall, is more compliant and settled.

The Liberty’s Boxer engine might be down on comparative power and torque but, in Sports Mode, it makes the most of what it’s got. The Subaru corners flat and reassuringly stable, thanks to high traction and grip levels afforded by its Symmetrical All-Wheel-Drive system. Braked towing...
capability favours the Subaru, 1500kg to 1300kg.

Driver comfort in both is impressive thanks to multi-powered seat adjustment that includes lumbar (four-way on Sonata, two-way on Liberty).

By our measurements, the Sonata offers better front headroom and width across the rear seat, whereas the Liberty has more rear knee room. Both have generous boots, though the Hyundai wins the space race, 510 to 493 litres.

In addition to equipment listed on the panel (at right), each has a full-sized spare, auto dusk-sensing headlights, steering wheel-mounted audio and phone controls, powered folding external mirrors (the Liberty’s are heated), leather seats, Smart Key and push button start.

But it’s the Subaru that has that little bit more: electric sunroof, heated front seats and important safety tech aimed at avoiding, or reducing the impact of, crashes.

CONCLUSION

We applaud Subaru for making an already safe car even more so. We also like its better retained value, high standard equipment and driving comfort levels, as well as its AWD grip and traction.

The Sonata is a big improvement over the model it replaces, the i45. Strong, turbo-based performance and on-road dynamics, generous rear interior and boot space and long warranty all add to its considerable appeal.

If the driving experience matters most, go the Hyundai; if reassurance and practicality prevails, then the Subaru is your car.

TESTERS: BARRY GREEN, JOHN EWING.
STARTERS: HYUNDAI SONATA ELITE, SUBARU LIBERTY 2.5i PREMIUM

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