Long, light and low — Azera's Fluidic Sculpture design takes inspiration from the mechanics of flight.

By Steve Schaefer

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With the new Azera, Hyundai has completed its 24/7 2.0 program. That means they delivered on their promise to bring out seven new or revised vehicles in just 24 months. That's a pretty darned amazing accomplishment. The Azera takes off from the popular midsize Sonata and offers a little more room, power and style (and price, of course).

It's hard to remember sometimes where Hyundai was years ago. Hyundais were odd, derivative, cramped, funny-smelling little transportation modules. But for the last, say, decade, things have really turned around. This new, second-generation Azera sedan offers a long list of standard features, cavernous passenger accommodations, and, with another take on Hyundai's "Fluidic Sculpture" design template, head-turning style.

The car comes only as a sedan and with just one engine — a 3.3-liter V6, with 293 horsepower and 255 lb.-ft. of torque. That may be because the model not only fits in size between the midsize Sonata and the luxury Genesis sedan, it reserves the four-cylinder engine for the Sonata and two V8s for the Genesis.

The V6 is mated to Hyundai's six-speed automatic transmission with SHIFTRONIC® manual control. This transmission offers smooth shifts and a wide ratio spread that ideally suits the engine's characteristics.

Azera's powertrain also has an Active Eco mode, which modifies engine and transmission control for improved fuel economy. You don't have to do anything except push the Eco button, but it can add up to as much as a five-percent fuel economy improvement.

At 3,605 pounds, the Azera is more than 200 pounds lighter than the Buick LaCrosse (3,835 pounds) and more than 400 pounds lighter than the Ford Taurus (4,015 pounds). That means that the 3.3-liter V6, slightly smaller than competitors' 3.5 and 3.6-liter engines, delivers the goods, with the highest horsepower per liter of any competitor. And being a little lighter, it doesn't feel like a tank going down the road.

Despite its large-midsize proportions, the Azera gets decent mileage. The EPA says 20 City, 28 Highway, with an average of 23. I got 21.9 mph — still reasonable. Environmentally, the car rates 6 for Air Pollution and 5 for Greenhouse Gas — right in the middle.

The Azera's body is attractive and energetic looking. The customer for this type of car isn't really looking to make a powerfully unique statement, but he or she does want to look up-to-date, and the car has all the right touches. The grille is chrome and prominent. The folds along the body sides are just like you'd find on an Infiniti or even a BMW. The headlamps and taillamps are chock full of jewelry. Hard to believe that not long ago the illuminated parts of cars were plain plastic bars.