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Hyundai concept breaks new ground for Korean automaker

Posted 01/05/99 5:03 p.m. CST

DETROIT — Marking its first foray into the sport utility market, Hyundai on Tuesday introduced the [Santa Fe](#) compact SUV at the North American International Auto Show. Evidence of the vehicle's U.S.



Hyundai Santa Fe

design is apparent in the Southwestern palette used by the Korean automaker. The tri-color scheme combines a burnt orange sheet-metal exterior, cafe au lait outer body cladding and a subdued saffron leather interior.

Powered by a 24-valve, transversely mounted V-6 engine, the Santa Fe is equipped with a four-speed, electronically controlled automatic transmission. Size-wise, the little ute will compete with the Honda CR-V, Isuzu Rodeo and Toyota RAV4. Several amenities have been added specifically to appeal to U.S. buyers. These include universal-size cupholders, dual 12-volt in-dash outlets, a lift-out picnic table and a rear-storing spare tire. A production version of the concept vehicle is scheduled to go on sale in spring 2000.

The vehicle on display was equipped with an in-dash CD player, AM/FM stereo, cassette tape, and front and rear speakers. The four-door hatchback has a split rear seat with armrests, mimicking bucket seats. Although many styling touches were mocked up for the concept — such as plastic molding on the center console — there are signs of aggressive styling such as shark-fin exhaust vents on both sides of the dash. Other nice touches include light brown leather-covered gear selector and parking brake handle.



Hyundai Santa Fe

Safety features include second-generation, depowered front airbags, with a passenger-presence detection system that shuts off the passenger-side airbag when a small child occupies the seat.

Initially based on the Elantra, the Santa Fe acquired Sonata cues along the way, according to a Hyundai spokesman. The automaker expects to sell 20,000 to 25,000 units during the first year of the vehicle's release. Although a price has yet to be released, a Hyundai spokesman said that this vehicle will offer the most for the money, compared to the competition.

*Reported by [Mary S. Butler](#), **[cars.com](#)***

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