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Test Hyundai ix35 – Autocar (UK)

Hyundai iX35 2.0 CRDi Premium

Test date 10 March 2010

Price as tested £20,745

For Sharp looks, classy, high-spec interior, outstanding value for money

Against Firm low-speed ride, engine noise when cold, restricted visibility

BACKGROUND

Hyundai no longer needs to prove that it can match European standards. It has been doing that since it launched the i30 in 2007. But with the new ix35, Hyundai not only claims that it is offering quality for a low price, but it would also have us believe that the ix35 offers SUV looks and ability, compact MPV practicality and small hatchback levels of affordability. If you believe its maker, this is not simply a compact SUV but a crossover vehicle.

From its launch, the ix35 is available with a 2.0-litre petrol or 2.0-litre diesel engine, two or four-wheel drive and just two trim levels. A new 1.7-litre turbodiesel and 1.6-litre petrol engine will join the range later in the year, along with start-stop technology.

Prices start at just £16,495 for the base two-wheel-drive petrol model and stretch to £20,745 for the top-spec 2.0 CRDi 4WD model tested here, so there's no denying that the ix35 is priced competitively. But can the ix35 really compete in the various classes that it is supposedly targeting, or even fulfil its primary function as an affordable soft-roader? That is what we're here to find out.

DESIGN

The ix35 is clearly designed to appeal to style-conscious buyers, whichever demographic they fall into. This is the first Hyundai model to showcase the company's new 'fluidic' design language, which will characterise all future models.

The angular grille will be a particularly distinctive feature for modern Hyundais, and to our eyes it suits the ix35. There is a pronounced sporty stance to the ix35. Its tapering side windows and roofline are designed to create a coupé look, and the sharply defined headlights and bonnet strakes are also intended to give the car a more aggressive character. It's a bold leap forward from the previously



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bland styling practised by Hyundai, and it makes it clear that the ix35 is a revolution next to the Tucson, its distinctly forgettable predecessor.

The ix35 is about the same length as a typical family hatchback. Hyundai points out that the ix35 is shorter than many C-segment hatches, although it is, in fact, longer than a Nissan Qashqai and by no means a small car at nearly 4.5 metres long.

It uses an all-new platform that includes two separate lightweight subframes, from which MacPherson strut suspension is mounted at the front, with a multi-link set-up at the rear. Two-phase dampers adjust automatically for soft or firm settings, according to speed and road surface.

The four-wheel drive system is the same as that used in the bigger Santa Fe so it is a part-time system that, in normal conditions, sends 100 per cent of the power to the front axle. If there is any loss of traction at the front, it can send up to 50 per cent of the power to the rear wheels. There's also the option of locking the differential into 50/50 four-wheel drive mode up to 25mph.

ON THE ROAD

It is the mid-range muscle of the 2.0-litre turbodiesel motor that will be of most use to ix35 drivers. With the full 236lb ft of torque available from 1800rpm to 2500rpm, it's easy to keep the engine comfortably in its powerband and make the most of the acceleration on offer. Otherwise, the outright pace is good for an SUV of this size and weight, with our test figures matching Hyundai's claimed 0-62mph time of 10.2sec.

Most of the time the ix35's diesel motor is refined enough, but it's gruff when cold and intrudes into the cabin through the bulkhead if you're working the engine more than moderately. It's most vocal when you're travelling in first and second gear around town.

Engine noise is naturally less evident when cruising at higher speeds, although it could be quietened further with little effort. Because of its ample torque, the diesel ix35 could use a longer sixth gear than its current top ratio, which leaves it spinning at about 2500rpm at 70mph. At this sort of speed there's a fair degree of wind noise as well.

Our test economy will be of concern to prospective buyers, too. At just 36.2mpg, it fell a long way short of the official combined figure of 47.9mpg. Our touring figure of 43.8mpg, which was recorded over a specific test route at a moderate touring pace, proves that better fuel economy is achievable, but to get it requires more conscious effort than should be necessary, given the engine's specifications.

We've no qualms about the way that the ix35 stops. In both wet or (very cold and partially greasy) 'dry' conditions, it pulled up from 70mph in less than 50 metres, and its system is immune from fade on the road.

The ix35 rides more firmly than most other soft-roaders. The difference between the two settings that its dampers adopt is quite subtle, the most noticeable variation being a reduction in body roll when you make more demands of its chassis.

Whether you're asking a lot of the chassis or not, its firmness comes with a lack of isolation at low speeds, where the ix35 thumps (although doesn't crash) across potholes and road imperfections. At higher speeds, the ride improves as it soaks up bumps and potholes better. On the motorway, it's



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nearer to the top of the class for isolation, although there is also more noise through the suspension than you get with most of its rivals.

The most peculiar thing about the way the ix35 drives, though, is its electrically assisted steering, which has quick responses to a few degrees just off straight ahead but then seems dulled as more lock goes on. So changing lane on a motorway takes merely a change in pressure on the rim.

When maintaining a curve or taking an urban roundabout, though, we frequently found ourselves having to wind on more lock than we'd originally expected. Its weighting is good and, while there's no feel to speak of, there's a pleasing amount of self-centring.

In general use, the ix35's part-time four-wheel drive system makes no difference to its handling. As mentioned earlier, all the power is sent to the front wheels under normal conditions, aiding economy and emissions. Power is diverted to the rear only when the fronts detect spin, which is generally only under hard acceleration out of corners or on low-grip surfaces. The system reacts quickly to front slip and restores order rapidly.

The four-wheel drive system will also cut in to help keep the car on line if the nose starts to wash wide in a bend. This was only ever noticeable under hard driving on our wet track but adds another element of safety to the set-up.

LIVING

It is in this area that the Hyundai ix35 makes the most persuasive case for itself. Interior finish is fine and seemingly constructed with such precision and wise choice of materials that you barely notice that hardly any of them are soft to the touch.

Equipment levels are excellent, too. The standard equipment on our top-spec Premium model is class-leading, by some margin. Heated front and rear seats, ESP stability control, Bluetooth, panoramic glass sunroof, part-leather interior, rear parking sensors and automatic wipers and headlights are all included. The only reason to add options to a Premium model is if you want sat-nav, metallic paint or a full leather interior. Even the base Style models have a comprehensive kit list.

Our test car came with the £800 media pack, which brings with it a colour touch screen, sat-nav and rear parking camera. Even without this option, the ix35 is a pleasant place to be, but it helps to make the interior feel high class and cossetting.

The main interface is clear and usable, and all the switchgear feels solid and falls to hand easily. The driving position is good, and even though a broader range of adjustment would be welcome – particularly on how low you can set the driver's seat – most people will find it comfortable.

Unfortunately, visibility is distinctly average all round. Large A and B-pillars plus a high, narrow rear windscreen restrict vision. Large door mirrors help, but the ix35 still lacks the glassy, airy feel and all-round visibility offered by rivals such as the Nissan Qashqai and Skoda Yeti. Passenger space is plentiful, although rear passengers may feel a little claustrophobic because of the high, rising waistline and raked-back roofline, which restricts head room for tall rear passengers.



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Boot space is very good, at 591 litres with the seats up. That beats the 540 litres offered by the Audi Q5 and embarrasses the Ford Kuga's 360 litres. It is not the most practical load-carrier, though, because the fixed squab of the 60/40 rear seats prevents them from folding anywhere near flat.

Compare the ix35 to soft-roaders and it is clearly a class leader in terms of its purchase and running costs. Our Premium test car is the most expensive model in the ix35 range, yet it still undercuts rivals such as the Kuga by almost £5000.

Running costs are very good. Low emissions and an equally low list price mean that the ix35 will cost only £39 more per year in company car tax than a Ford Focus 2.0 TDCi Titanium, which also costs over £400 more to purchase privately.

Given that the standard equipment list, even on the base ix35 Style, is extremely generous and that residual values are predicted to be among the best in this class, owners should have little cause for complaint about value for money. The unlimited-mileage, five-year warranty is one last temptation that only one other rival – sister company Kia – can beat.

VERDICT



Hyundai has established itself as a maker of very capable vehicles, so it is no longer a surprise when it turns out a good car like the ix35. Perhaps the most impressive thing about the ix35 is that, despite an absence of premium-feel surfacing inside, its interior seldom feels like it is built down to the price that it obviously has been.

Its powertrain and dynamics are slightly less convincing. An occasional lack of engine refinement and a ride that could, and should, be better at town speeds are the biggest indications that Hyundai still operates towards the value end of the market.

That's a bigger problem when you're in a sector like this one, where customers have 'wants' rather than 'needs'. Nonetheless, the ix35 is competent, sharply designed and, above all, excellent value for people who want to get into soft-roader ownership.



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DATA

How much ?

- **Price as tested** £20,745
- **Price as tested** £22,245

How fast

- **0-30mph** 3 sec
- **0-60mph** 10 sec
- **0-100mph** 40.9 sec
- **0-150mph** no data
- **0-200mph** no data
- **30-70mph** no data
- **0-400m** 17.5 / 77.3 sec/mph
- **0-1000m** 32.8 / 95.5 sec/mph
- **30-50mph in 3rd/4th** 4.2 / 5.3
- **40-60mph in 4th/5th** 5.6 / 6.9 sec
- **50-70mph in 5th** 7.4 sec
- **60-0mph** no data
- **Top speed** 112 mph
- **Noise at 70mph** 68 dbA

How thirsty?

- **Test average** 36.2 mpg
- **Test best/worst** 43.8 / 27.4

Government figures

- **Combined/urban** 47.9 / 40.4 mpg
- **CO₂ emissions** 154 g/km

How big?

- **Length** 4410 mm
- **Width** 1820 mm
- **Height** 1660 mm
- **Wheelbase** 2640 mm
- **Weight** 1679 kg

Fuel tank 58.0 litres

Engine

- **Layout** 4 cyls , 1995 cc
- **Max power** 134 bhp at 4000 rpm
- **Max torque** 236 ft at 1800 rpm
- **Specific output** 67 bhp per litre
- **Power to weight** 79 bhp per tonne
- **Installation** F
- **Bore/stroke** 84.0x90.0 mm
- **Compression ratio** 10.5:1
- **Valve gear** 4 per cyl4
- **Ignition and fuel** no data, Diesel

Gearbox

- **Type** 6-speed Manual
- **1st** 3.61 / 4.9
- **2nd** 1.79 / 9.9
- **3rd** 1.54 / 15.6
- **4th** 1.176 / 20.5
- **5th** 0.97 / 24.8
- **6th** 0.83 / 29.1
- **Final drive** no data

Suspension

- **Front** MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar
- **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar

Steering

- **Type** Power assisted, rack and pinion
- **Lock to lock** 3.00

Brakes

- **Front** 300mm Vented Discs
- **Rear** 262mm Solid Discs

Wheel & tyres

- **Size front** 6.5x18" in
- **Size rear** 6.5x18" in
- **Made of** Alloy



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PHOTOS



<http://www.autocar.co.uk/CarReviews/RoadTestsHistory/Hyundai-ix35-2.0-CRDi-Premium-4WD/248222/>