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More than meets the i

An engine upgrade and a facelift enhances Hyundai i20's appeal



FULLY LOADED Features make the Hyundai i20 money's worth

It's easy to see why the first i20 was popular. It was stylish, packed with features and had enough cabin space to command an entry-level-saloon rivalling price. At Rs. 6.21 lakh for this mid-life refreshed Asta, the new i20 is still more expensive than some others in the segment. So, to make you feel like you're getting your money's worth, Hyundai has loaded this with even more features than the old i20. Standard on the Asta is a reverse camera, keyless entry and go, electric folding mirrors and climate control, auto wipers and six airbags. You also get Bluetooth connectivity, an audio system and USB and Aux-in ports. So that's one base covered.

The other, more obvious one, is with the styling. It's been a talking point of every new Hyundai in recent memory, and the i20 is no different. Of course, there have been no drastic, expensive changes to the sheet metal, but enough has been done, at least to the snub nose, to make the i20 look refreshingly new. Those blistered headlamps, for example, give it a very Volkswagen Scirocco-like look and the slim grille, deep front bumper and muscular chin all work well in making the i20 look attractive than before. Walk along the side though and you'll see almost no changes — there's just turn signals incorporated into the mirrors and chrome door handles. The rear

too has hardly changed with just new tail lamps, a slight re-profiling of the bumper and a new spoiler to indicate this is version 2.

Increased length

The facelift has also increased the length of the car to 3995mm, up 55mm thanks to the new bumpers. The height, width and wheelbase are, not surprisingly, identical.

There are no major changes on the inside either — the basic layout of the dashboard is the same and Hyundai has re-introduced that shiny chrome gearlever that does not look very refined. However, apart from this, the quality of every other

surface and switch has been upgraded. The new dark-grey surround for the audio, the leather-wrapped steering wheel and the snug seats really improve perceived quality and there's also an armrest for the driver's seat. Even the new dials and the digital fuel and temperature gauges between them look smart. Also, that other i20 advantage remains — its spacious interiors and its rather large boot.

It's when you dip the clutch in and press the engine start button that the most important change to the car becomes evident. The 1.2-litre Kappa engine now gets variable-valve timing technology for the intake and exhaust valves. So there's a

5bhp up in power from the old engine, but the torque remains almost identical. We drove the old and new i20 back to back and it was evident that there was no real difference in performance. The new engine is responsive to part throttle inputs but not as much as the old engine. Hyundai should have tuned the valve timing system for better low-end responses. It does have a marginally better mid-range though. Where it does score over the old car is in refinement. This engine is far smoother and quieter — a fact that's evident all the way from idle to the 6500rpm redline.

What also helps this feeling of refinement is the re-tuned suspension. Gone is the old car's

low-speed clunking over irregularities and this suspension is far more sophisticated in the way it tackles bumps in the city. That's not saying Hyundai has got it fully sorted out though. Go faster and the car loses some of its high-speed manners. So it must be said that the new i20 works best as a city car — it is easy to drive thanks to its light clutch, easy gearshift, superlight steering and good engine responses. The loose high-speed manners may make it a bit of a handful on highways. The facelifted i20 is typical Hyundai formula. It may not be the nicest to drive but will pamper you with its features, styling and impressive interiors.

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