



Leaving the City in rear view?

S.Muralidhar

It seemed like the summer had advanced upon us and had hit the sands earlier than expected. Just into the early hours of the noon and the wide roads were already throwing up wavy mirages. The glinting white sun shone fiercely outside, though inside, I was sitting within the comfortably air-conditioned confines of a familiar car.

The setting was in Dubai late last month and I was there to experience the new Hyundai Verna. The land of the Burj Khalifa and the Palm islands was certainly letting slip some signs of the slowdown, but of course, there were no effects of the turmoil that many other parts of the mid-west are going through.

As for the new, 7th generation Verna that I was driving, there is bound to be turmoil... amongst the competition that is. The new Verna, also sold as the Accent in many other markets of the world, will make its India debut by May this year. And the transformation is huge.

This is the 25th anniversary, so to say, for the Verna, a model that was first introduced as the Pony in 1976. The new (seventh-gen) Verna was in development for five years and last year it was launched in a few markets abroad.

Sultry in the sand

I was part of a bunch of journalists from all over the world, who had been flown into Dubai to drive the new Verna (the photos you see are of the Accent-badged, left-hand drive version of the Verna). We drove the Verna from our

hotel in the Jebel Ali area in Dubai to Fujairah on the shores of the Indian Ocean, a distance of about 380 kms.

The new Verna looks more compact than the predecessor, even when you step up close to it. There is none of the awkward appearance of bulkiness to the front of the car. And instead, the new Verna joins the trio of Hyundais that have already adopted the Korean company's Fluidic Sculpture design philosophy.

The Verna's design now joins and nicely carries forward the defining character lines of the new i10, the new Sonata and the new Tucson. Hyundai says that the design philosophy adds sophisticated, dynamic angles and elegant design lines that resemble calligraphic 'orchid strokes'. With the new Verna, Hyundai designers are said to have employed the design concept 'sleek on dynamic' for both the

exterior and the interior of the car.

What this has translated into is an exterior design that gives it a very coupe-like profile, which is also found in the latest iterations of other Hyundai models like the Sonata. The new Verna is sleeker. Gone are the languorous lines of the predecessor. Instead the lines surround the new model with a certain sense of hurried purpose. The new Verna exudes a new elegant, sophisticated attitude.

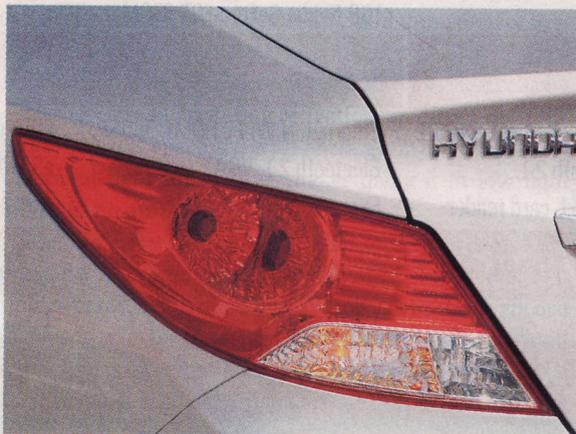
That doesn't mean that there are no examples of Hyundai's trademark novelty in the new Verna. The large hexagonal front grille, the new Hyundai design signature that the current i10 also showcases is one of the first design elements at the front that strike you. The eagle-eye two-tone bezel headlamps and the unique L-shaped fog lamps are the other features that catch the eye at the front.

Just below the sleek grille is a three-slatted airdam. The new Verna's design is more cohesive. All the body lines connect and culminate into creating a more 'wholistic' image compared to the previous models. The inverted bonnet crease and the side running lines are visual highlights that catch the light even in the shade.

A strong shoulder line, a coupe-like glass area and the curvaceous roofline will also catch the fancy of buyers in the premium sedan segment.

At the rear, the new Verna's simple and flowing, but tight design theme continues.

A stubby boot is dominated by petal-shaped wrap-around tail-lamps. An over-sized rear bumper is cut deep by the boot door ensuring a low loading height and easy access into the cavernous luggage area.





Photos: S. Muralidhar

Changing dimensions

The Hyundai Verna has had its work cut out to some extent by its predecessor - deliver as much value, but in a package that is larger and smarter.

The new Verna is built on a 2,570mm long structural platform, which is about 70mm longer than the outgoing model.

Most of that extra length has gone into leveraging extra space for the front and rear passengers. The legroom for the front seats is said to be now on a par with that of a medium sized car at 1,112mm. It is also wider and longer overall than its predecessor by 5mm and 90mm, at 1,700mm and 4,370mm respectively.

The overall height, however, has been marginally reduced by about 13mm to 1,457mm. Hyundai designers chose to do that to ensure that the car's sporty coupe-like profile is maintained, though they have also ensured that the head room in the cabin is not reduced.

But the best part of the design of the new Verna is its ability to compress itself into you when at the wheel. So, despite the larger proportions, the overall design makes you feel that you are actually driving a smaller car.

Also worth remembering here is the fact that most of the new Verna's key dimensions are more than the current segment benchmark - Honda City.

Smart interiors

To take the fight further, Hyundai is also making some significant India-specific changes to the Verna both inside and out. A dual disk horn, a twin-tip chrome muffler,

electrically folding door mirrors (which also have integrated LED indicators) are some of the exterior changes for the India-spec model.

Inside the new Verna the additions will be chrome aircon vents, a rear seat audio remote control, wood grain inserts for the door panels and special storage space in the rear seat arm rest.

The one other addition to the India-spec model's list is the more delicious bit - a new U II 1.4-litre diesel engine. For the first time in this segment, the new Verna will be offered with as many as four engine options - two petrol and two diesel units.

The new Verna I drove at Dubai featured the new 1.6-litre Gamma engine. It is a DOHC, inline four-cylinder



engine with multiport fuel injection and continuously variable valve timing (CVVT). The new Gamma engine is more powerful with an output of 123 PS at 6,300 rpm compared to the outgoing Verna Alpha engine's 103 PS at 5,500 rpm. The new 1.6-litre engine is also more torquey generating as much as 15.8 KgM at 4,200 rpm compared to the Alpha engine's 14.9 KgM at 3,000 rpm.

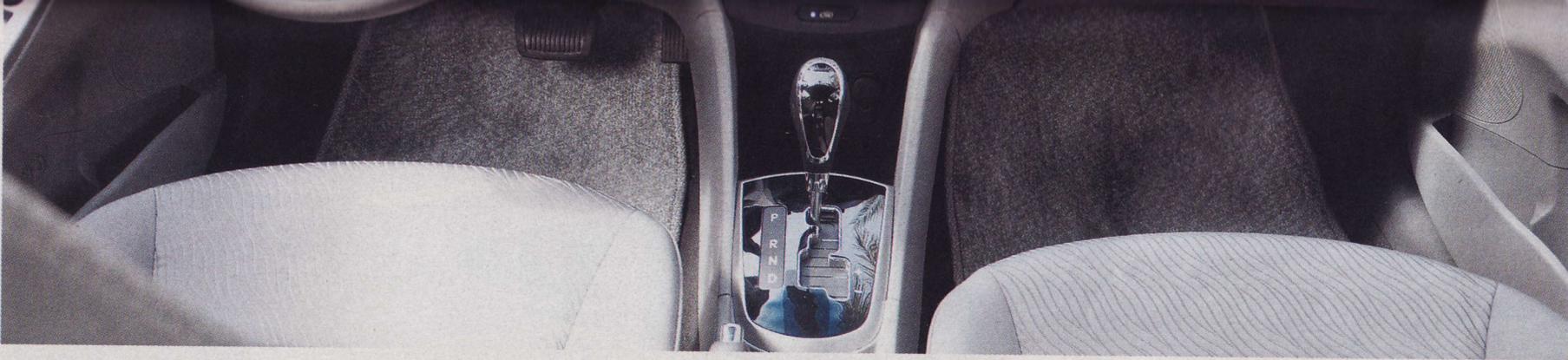
The other petrol engine that will be offered will be the 1.4-litre Gamma that will put out a peak power of 108 PS and peak torque of 13.9 KgM. Both the engines are expected to be mated with a choice of two transmissions - a four-speed automatic and a five-speed manual.

The 1.6 Gamma I drove was paired with the automatic transmission. It is a very refined, quiet and vibe-free engine.

Though the engine has ample reserves of power, it felt a little hamstrung by a slightly slower shifting auto gearbox. With the manual gearbox, I am sure the 1.6 Gamma will outdo the others in the segment.

The Dubai-Fujairah stretch was chosen by Hyundai for the varied terrain it offered. The highway runs through a healthy mix of straights, hilly/curvy and city driving conditions.

By the time the Verna is launched here, it will be offered with two other engines. Claimed to be quiet, clean and responsive, the Verna will get a U-II 1.6-litre VGT (variable geometry turbocharger) diesel engine with peak power characteristics of 128 bhp and peak torque of 26.5 KgM. It will also be offered with a U-II 1.4 VGT diesel engine that will generate 90 bhp of power and 22.5 KgM of torque.



Lasting impressions

I found the quality interior of the new Verna to be another step up by Hyundai. A Y-shaped, symmetrical dashboard layout is simple and pleasing to the eye.

The quality of plastic and other materials used is above average for the segment and there is a general sense of symmetry and proportion to the position of all the controls and panels.

For improving the ride and handling, Hyundai engineers have also replaced the old style sub-frame at the front in the Verna and have instead now give it a H-shape

sub-frame for making a lighter structure overall and to assist the independent suspension. At the rear, a coupled torsion beam axle set up does the job of optimising the suspension. Steering is motor driven and helps in precise control. The new Verna is yet to be rated for fuel efficiency, but it is expected to be better than the predecessor's. Other features in the new Verna include a Bluetooth system for the music system that allows the driver to both make hands-free phone calls and also stream music wirelessly to the cars speakers.

The Verna will also be offered with an optional back

warning system and a back-up camera with a hidden LCD display in the electro-chromic rear-view mirror to help the driver park with ease while reversing. The new Verna will certainly be a force to reckon with when it is launched later this year. With the new styling and powertrain packages Hyundai will surely look to the Verna for bridging the gap in numbers with its competitors. But, pricing will still remain a key factor in ensuring that it tops the list. I expect it to be in the range of Rs 7 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. Two months to go...

muraliswami@thehindu.co.in

