

# 2007 Hyundai Entourage: The Minivan Wars Heat Up

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It was only a matter of time before they entered the minivan fray and after several false starts the on again and off again Hyundai minivan appears to be on once again. Hyundai is targeting a market it has long sidestepped and it appears that a long wheelbase version of the Kia Sedona will soon be sold in the US as a Hyundai Entourage. The minivan wars are heating up again even as one competitor exits the market and another also gives serious consideration to abandoning the minivan segment. Is there an Entourage in your future? Read on for all the details and then decide.

Two decades ago, Hyundai entered the North American market with its \$3600 Excel Pony. This cheaply priced, cheaply built model set the tone for the new importer and it wasn't a good one at that. Low quality went arm and arm with the low price, but consumers still bought Hyundais anyway as a new Excel compared favorably with prices for late model used cars of that era. Many owners shrugged off the cheap plastics and quality problems, citing that the Pony gave them something they never had before: a brand new car.

Eventually, Hyundai expanded its line up and improved its quality levels. An industry best warranty plan was crafted and put in place which helped to underscore that Hyundai was serious about building quality vehicles and would stand behind their many products. Mysteriously, a minivan was not part of the line up even as its Kia subsidiary successfully introduced the Sedona and as demand for minivans remained strong.

Rumors of a Hyundai minivan have been circulating for several years. Even previous company press releases hinted at the possibility, but no official announcement had been forthcoming. Finally, late in 2005, Hyundai signaled that they would go ahead and produce a minivan based on the stretched wheelbase version of the Kia Sedona. No short wheelbase van is planned, so the Entourage will clearly target a slightly higher and more lucrative end of the minivan market.

With a 3.8L V6 engine, power sliding doors, ABS, traction control, six airbags, and triple zone air conditioning, the Entourage will be equipped to compete directly against four popular models: the Dodge Caravan, Chrysler Town & Country, Honda Odyssey, and the Toyota Sienna. Based on the Sedona, Hyundai does have its work cut out for itself as the Sedona has been below average in quality and reliability.

To Hyundai's advantage will be its competitive pricing and with Ford out of the market and General Motors considering doing the same, Hyundai's focus will be set squarely on competing against the two Chrysler products as well as the pricey Honda and Sienna models. While Chrysler is currently the sales leader in this segment, a smartly optioned Entourage will probably grab sales from fully equipped versions of each model. This will not happen if quality levels do not improve.

Knowing the competitiveness of this Korean automaker, you can expect that the Entourage will present a strong battle once quality issues have been overcome. Should that happen, you can expect that the Hyundai Entourage and Kia Sedona will grab more sales and become a force to be reckoned with. The consumer may be the biggest winner as prices are likely to hold or even come down in the face of strong competition. **Copyright 2006 – Matt Keegan** is a freelance writer covering important automotive topics and products including timing chain, timing chain replacement and Cloyes timing chain parts.