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Hyundai Kona compact SUV – Road Test

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Hyundai Kona has joined the congested compact SUV market...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

On sale in the UK from the end of last year, the first turbocharged petrol powered models in the Hyundai Kona, compact SUV model line up were priced from £16,195 to £24,995 at launch but these have already risen to £16,445 to £25,245. Mid-year these petrol versions will be joined by two turbodiesel engine options and what is already being described as the 'gamechanger' version, the all-electric Kona making its debut at this week's Geneva Motor Show.



Why 'gamechanger'? Well compact SUVs are very popular, showing considerable sales growth, as is demand for all-electric family hatchbacks. Combine compact SUV styling with all-electric power and Hyundai should be onto a winner. The all-electric Kona is said to have a driving range of close to 300 miles on a single electric charge. Prices are yet to be revealed, estimated £26k to £30k, but their very low tax and running costs should offset the initial potentially high, for the compact SUV sector, purchase price. Like all new Hyundai models the Kona electric version will be covered by a five year unlimited mileage warranty.

But that's in the future; now back to the here and now Kona models. The Kona completes Hyundai's SUV range which already consists of the medium sized Tucson and large Santa Fe models, and Hyundai UK is on record as saying that SUVs could account for half of their new car sales within the next few years. They sold a record 93,403 new cars in the UK last year, just slightly ahead of their other South Korean family member Kia.



Initially the five door Niro is available with two turbocharged T-GDi direct injection petrol engine. There is the 1.0 litre three-cylinder 120 hp unit with a six speed manual gearbox with front wheel drive, available with S, SE, Premium and Premium SE specification levels and priced from £16,445. Those all-important tax gathering CO2 emission levels range from 117 to 125 g/km. Topping the current range is the Premium GT spec level powered by a 1.6 litre four cylinder engine with 177 hp, matched as standard with a seven-speed twin clutch automatic gearbox and four wheel drive, which includes 4WD Lock and Hill Descent Control for off-road driving. This version is priced at £25,245 and has CO2 emissions of 153 g/km.

The forthcoming 1.6 litre diesel units with expected 116 and 134 hp outputs will also be available with a choice of two or four wheel drive and with manual and auto gearbox



options, depending on the engine chosen. The all-electric model is expected to be two wheel drive and auto only but that has to be confirmed.

The Hyundai Kona faces stiff competition for sales against already established in the compact SUV/Crossover market sector models such as the Nissan Juke, Renault Capture, Citroën C3 Aircross, Peugeot 2008, SEAT Arona, Ford EcoSport, Kia Stonic, Mitsubishi ASX, Vauxhall Mokka/Crossland X, Suzuki Vitara/S-Cross, MINI Countryman and MG ZS.

It's definitely a buyer's market so dealers will have to be on-form with customer attention and service to capture customers and make sure they have a 'sharp pencil' when it comes to offering a financial deal that's better than the competition. Currently those all-important PCP (Personal Contract Purchase) financial terms offer a variety of deposit and repayment choices but a base 1.0 S version with a £5k deposit and the £1k deposit contribution from Hyundai has a 48 monthly repayment figure of £140.53.

With an overall length of 4,165 mm (13.66 ft) the Kona sits on top of a new platform, not an elevated version of their i20 supermini sized hatchback, unlike its other family Kia brand where their new Stonic uses a version of their Rio supermini platform. The bespoke new Hyundai platform allows Hyundai to package a four wheel drive system and the future model's all-electric components such as the battery pack into the vehicle without compromise. Otherwise the Kona is similar in most respects to other compact SUVs with a rising waistline, sloping coupé style roof, muscular wheelarches and lots of detailed plastic cladding around the vehicle, protecting the lower front and rear bumpers, the side sills and cleverly around the rear light clusters - giving it a more purposeful SUV image than Kia's Stonic as an example.

The rear tailgate gives access to a modest 361 litre (12.75 cu.ft) boot, which isn't the biggest in this sector. Fold down the 60/40 split rear seat backs and this space goes up to 1,143 litres (40.36 cu.ft), again not class leading but at least the seat backs fold down almost flat to ease the loading of long items. Unfortunately the rear seats don't have a fore/aft sliding function like some of the latest entries to this sector. The rear seating is



more appropriate for two passengers but you could squeeze in three children.

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The front interior design is fairly conventional with the touchscreen taking centre stage in the dashboard and there is a cowed instrument binnacle in front of the driver. There is the usual array of switches and controls, some obvious as to their function but others take a bit of learning. Generally the quality of the interior looks good and the dashboard has some areas of soft-touch plastic trim and the plastics look and feel of better quality than some competitor models. The personalisation of various brightly coloured trim options lightens the overall dark appearance of the interior. Visibility is generally good although it's restricted at the rear corners by the dipping roofline and broad pillars.

Specification is generous even for the lowest S level and includes 16-inch alloy wheels, rear spoiler with integrated LED brake light, 60/40 split folding rear seats, air-con, automatic headlamps with LED daytime running lamps, cruise control with speed limiter, electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors, electric front and rear windows, DAB radio and Bluetooth, 5-inch centre console display, USB and AUX connections and steering wheel controls for audio, telephone and cruise control operation. The SE level's major gains are 17-inch alloy wheels, roof rails, fog lamps, electric driver's seat lumbar support, a parking system including rear parking sensors and rear camera, 7-inch touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. The Premium level additions include 18-inch alloy wheels, climate control, automatic wipers and solar glass to the front windows and windscreen with privacy glass to the rear windows and tailgate, Smart Key with keyless entry and engine start/stop button, high end KRELL premium audio system with eight speakers, amplifier and subwoofer, 8-inch touchscreen with sat-nav and a wireless phone charging pad. Premium SE adds leather seat facings, with electrically adjustable driver and front passenger seats which also offer seat heating and ventilation plus there is a heated steering wheel, rear centre arm rest, power folding door mirrors and front parking sensors, Head Up Display, Blind Spot Detection and Lane Keeping Assist. The top of the range Premium GT with the 1.6 T-GDi 177hp engine, standard seven speed auto gearbox with 4WD gains full LED



headlamps with High Beam Assist and static bending function as well as LED rear tail lamps, a driver's instrument cluster with 4.2-inch LCD multifunction screen and the important Safety Pack which includes Autonomous Emergency Braking with pedestrian recognition. This function is also available as an extra cost £235 option for lesser spec models although for its reasonable costs I think it should be standard fit for all models. Other extra cost options are 2-Tone roof paintwork at £420, Sunroof also at £420 and metallic paint at £565.

Although the main selling engine will be the 1.0 litre 120 hp petrol unit with a manual gearbox and only with 2WD, because of price, my test version was the showcase model - the top of the range Premium GT 1.6 T-GDi 177 hp version with its seven speed double clutch auto gearbox and 4WD. This model now costs a high £25,245 plus the extra £420 cost for the smart 2-Tone black roof colour.



I have previously driven the 1.0 T-GDi three cylinder engine in the Kia Stonic and found it likeable providing it was kept in its powerband, which required considerable use of the gearbox. Let the revs drop and the momentum slowed rapidly but for commuter driving with the occasional long run it's ideal and considerably cheaper to buy and run than the 1.6 litre unit.

The 1.6 litre turbocharged direct injection petrol four-cylinder unit with 177 hp and 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque (available from a low 1,500 rpm right up to a high 4,500 rpm) is far more muscular, giving lots of engine response at all speeds even coupled with the auto gearbox and 4WD system. Its impressively quick with a top speed of 127 mph but more practically a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 7.9 seconds. Compared to the 1.0 litre engine option it suffers from poorer fuel economy and higher CO2 emissions so more expensive running costs can be added to the high purchase price. Officially this 1.6 unit will



return 42.2 mpg in the Combined Cycle but my week of test driving over a mix of short and long runs including urban, country and motorway driving the real-life figure was just 35.4 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 153 g/km so VED road tax is a high £500 First Year rate before dropping to the £140 Standard rate for year two onwards. Insurance is Group 19A.

The 1.6 litre 4WD model does have some gains over the 2WD model as it uses a better multilink rear suspension system to accommodate the 4WD system rather than the cheaper torsion twist beam axle used for the 1.0 litre 2WD models. The 2WD models, I'm told by my colleagues, ride better on the smaller wheels of the lesser specced versions. But best of all is the 1.6 version with its independent rear suspension which irons out all but the worst of bumps from potholes and sharpens up the handling balance added by the grip from the standard fit 4WD system. Unfortunately the tyre pressure warning light came on and remained on during my week of test driving although the tyre pressure was regularly checked and remained fully inflated to the correct pressure.

VERDICT

In short the Kona is an important model range for Hyundai in a very competitive and popular market sector. It doesn't come up short on looks and specification but for now the engine choices are limited and not having an automatic transmission option for the more cost-effective to buy and run 1.0 litre engine is a definite drawback. The forthcoming diesel models will bring in high mileage fleet and business user-chooser customers, but the dark-horse all electric model arriving midyear should be the game-changer for the range and the one with most appeal, providing Hyundai get the price right. It should set the Kona apart from the huge array of competitor compact SUV models which the current petrol versions fail to do.

For: Good looks, high specification 4WD drive and auto gearbox, brisk and responsive performance, secure and balanced handling, diesel and all-electric models to come later this year.

Against: 1.6 litre petrol version is expensive to buy and run, no auto gearbox option for 1.0



litre models, Autonomous Emergency Braking should be standard fit for all models, not as roomy in the rear seats or boot/load area as some competitor models, dark interior trim, faulty tyre pressure sensor on my test model.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Hyundai Kona Premium GT 1.6 T-GDi automatic 4WD compact



SUV.

Price: £25,245 (£25,665 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder turbocharged direct injection petrol 177 hp, 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque, seven speed twin clutch automatic with 4WD + 4WD Lock and Hill Descent Control.

Performance: 127 mph, 0-62 mph 7.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 42.2 mpg (35.4 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 153 g/km, VED road tax £500/£140, BiK company car tax 29%.

Insurance Group: 19A.

Warranty: Five years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,165 mm (13.66 ft), W 1,800 mm (5.91 ft), H 1,565 mm (5.13 ft), boot/load space 361 to 1,143-litres (12.75 to 40.36 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,250 kg (2756 lb), five doors/five seats.