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Kia Driving Day – Brief Impressions

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Kim Henson briefly test drives a selection of current Kia models...

(All words and photographs by Kim).

At the moment it is the exception rather than the rule for a motor manufacturer to be doing well in terms of vehicle sales in the UK. However, bucking the general trend, Kia is doing very well indeed, increasing sales while for most of the firms all around them the figures are in reverse... At the time of writing (June 2019) the latest figures (for the month of May) show best-ever Kia sales for that month of 7,279 vehicles - eight per cent up on the same month in 2018, and ahead of the company's previous record of 6,912, achieved in 2016. That's impressive.



Reasons for this include the huge range of models offered by the South Korean company, and the fact that these vehicles are increasingly being seen by British buyers as desirable and relevant to their lifestyles. In addition, from compact hatchback to sports models to SUVs/MPVs of all sizes, electric propulsion to petrol to diesel power, all bases are covered.

Furthermore, the company's standard seven year/100,000 miles warranty shows to potential buyers that the firm has faith in its products.

At a recent multi-model Kia driving day event for the motoring press, I was able to assess several current models from the firm's line-up, driving them on a variety of different types of roads around south Gloucestershire and north Wiltshire.

e-Niro



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Having previously driven hybrid versions of various Kias, I was expecting the e-Niro 'all electric' model to be good. However, truly I was taken aback at just how competent this car is.

This model is not a hybrid but driven by electrical power only, courtesy of a 64kWh electric motor developing 201 bhp plus 395 Nm (291 lb.ft) of torque, all the way from rest to 3,600 rpm.



It provides a near-silent driving experience, during which plenty of information is provided to the driver by the on-screen dash displays, in terms of the operational status of the motor, whether it is being recharged by regenerative braking/deceleration (and by how much) and range remaining.

Three levels of electrical regeneration are provided, with the first level offering gentle retardation as the driver eases off the power pedal, but with the highest (third) level giving serious retardation when required (for example when descending steep hills and slowing down without the need for using the brakes), and activation of this level illuminates the brake lamps too.



The car can be driven effortlessly in heavy traffic, with the electric motor easing the car along at low to medium speeds, but once out of town on open roads, on-the-move acceleration levels are spectacularly good.

The car also felt solidly-built and safe, with excellent handling and ride comfort characteristics. I was also impressed by the generous interior space for all occupants, and the large boot.

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If you are interested in reading more about the e-Niro and the fascinating background to the development of this model, you might also be interested in reading the comprehensive feature written by my colleague David Miles; please click here:

<https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/kia-e-niro-first-impressions/>



VERDICT

It's great to drive, inexpensive to run (if not to buy), comfortable, spacious and practical for a family. It also shows the way forward (including to other manufacturers) in terms of potential driving range between recharges. With a realistic potential range of more than 250 miles on long trips (and much further in town use), this makes the car a much more



useful and desirable proposition to potential buyers, than other 'pure' electric cars with much shorter ranges – but then we have been saying this for a long time!

Incidentally, my fellow motoring writers on this Kia driving day event were all as impressed as I was by this vehicle.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia e-Niro 64kWh First Edition all electric 'Crossover'.

Price: £32,995 (after the Government's £3,500 grant is applied).

Drivetrain: 201 bhp, 395 Nm (291 lb.ft) electric motor, 150kw battery pack, one forward, one reverse gear, front wheel drive.

Performance: 104 mph, 0-60 mph 7.5 seconds, WLTP full charge driving range for City driving 382 miles, Combined Cycle 282 miles.

Sorento 2.2 CRDI 'GT-Line S' Auto AWD seven seater SUV



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The well-respected Sorento 'Crossover'/SUV range starts at £30,250 and regardless of version chosen, provides buyers with a spacious and comfortable family vehicle that is enjoyable to drive as well as practical.

I tried the 2.2 litre CRDI 'GT-Line S' variant, a well-equipped, impressive machine powered by Kia's proven turbodiesel engine, and which provides spacious accommodation for passengers and luggage. As is usually the case with seven seater SUVs (as opposed to purpose-designed MPVs/people carriers) the two rearmost seats are less generous in terms of available space for occupants than the centre row of three, but will still accommodate two adults when required.



The cost of my test car is £42,925, which means that since this purchase price comes in at over £40,000, there are disadvantageous road tax cost implications...

I couldn't help but be impressed by the very smart interior and the evident attention to detail shown in the design and build of the vehicle.

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On the road the Sorento was eager to perform and felt mechanically refined. It handled well for a large car and felt composed on the rough road surfaces typically found 'everywhere' in the UK...

At 60 mph the vehicle is hushed and the engine needs just 1,500 rpm - good for fuel economy and mechanical longevity.

VERDICT

An attractive and practical proposition for families, when seven seats may be required at times. The Sorento has high quality interior trim and drives well.



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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Sorento 2.2 CRDi 'GT-Line S' Auto seven seater SUV.

Price: £42,925 'On the Road'.

Engine/transmission: 2.2 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel engine, 197 bhp, 441 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 to 2,750 rpm, eight speed automatic transmission.

Performance: 127 mph, 0-60 mph 9.1 seconds.



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Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 37.7 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 161 g/km.

Ceed 1.6 T-GDi GT



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Next on my driving agenda was the sporting-in-nature Ceed 1.6 T-GDi GT five door hatchback...

As with all the Kias I drove at this event, my first impressions were positive, especially in terms of overall appearance, fit and finish – and the interior treatment was of a very high standard.



The sports type, wrap-around front seats proved to be as supportive and comfortable as they looked, and the materials used throughout the car's passenger compartment appeared to be of high quality.



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The only fly in the ointment, interior-wise, is that leg room for rear seat occupants is not very generous, especially with the front seats set towards the rearmost extent of their travel.

On the other hand, the load compartment, accessed via a high-lifting tailgate, is long, wide and deep, quite capable of carrying a family's holiday luggage, for example.



Under the bonnet is a turbocharged four cylinder 1.6 litre petrol engine developing 201 bhp, and, importantly, a maximum torque figure of 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) all the way from 1,500 through to 4,500 rpm. This translates to a drive that can be as docile as a kitten when driving in traffic, with strong pulling power from low rpm, but on the open road the car's



extrovert character comes to the fore. Acceleration is brisk (in fact VERY brisk with 'Sport' mode engaged), from standstill and on the move, and the engine delivers responsive performance at all speeds (the tachometer is relined at 6,500 rpm).



When cruising at 60 mph in sixth (top) gear on the manual version I drove, the rev counter needle was indicating 2,500 rpm. The gearchange was smooth, precise and rapid; perfect for a sporting machine.



I found handling and roadholding to be excellent - the suspension on this version has been enhanced to handle the power - and braking from all speeds was reassuringly good.

I found the ride quality was surprisingly compliant for a sporty hatchback; the car was comfortable as well as competent through the twisty bits on undulating 'B' roads (for example).

VERDICT

A happy blend of subtle styling, well-sorted drivetrain/running gear and five door hatchback



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practicality (with a big boot), make this wolf in sheep's clothing a very attractive vehicle.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Ceed 1.6 T-GDi GT

Price: £25,850 'On the Road'.



Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder, 16 valve engine, 201 bhp, 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque at 1,500 to 4,500 rpm, six speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 143 mph, 0-60 mph 7.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined, 38.2 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 163 g/km.

Picanto 'X-Line S' 1.25 MPi



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Last but not least for me on this driving event was a necessarily brief drive in the comprehensively-equipped Picanto 'S-Line X' compact five door hatchback. Indeed the transporters were already arriving to take the Kias 'home' as I set off on my last drive of the day...

Over the last few years Kia's Picanto models have become well-respected small hatchbacks and with current range prices starting at £9,895 are still relatively affordable. The top of the line-up X-Line S version costs quite a lot more, at £14,220, but is particularly well-equipped in terms of comfort and convenience features, as well as the all-important safety aspects.



For example, standard features on the test car included an electrically-operated sun roof, front and rear electric windows, automatic air conditioning, a heated steering wheel, a cruise control/speed limiter system and a host of other goodies.

The 1.25 litre four cylinder engine proved to be nippy in character, and cruised quietly at speed, with 60 mph in fifth (top) gear occurring at a refined 2,600 rpm. However with maximum torque output (122 Nm or 90 lb.ft) delivered at a fairly high 4,000 rpm, it is necessary to keep the motor spinning at more than 2,000 rpm to obtain optimum pulling power.

I found that the five speed gearbox was easy to operate and smooth in action. I was also impressed by the ride quality and the competent dynamic behaviour of the car through bendy lanes as well as on open road gentle twists and turns.

I thought that the interior was pleasantly finished and the seats comfortable, although leg room for rear seat passengers is very limited. The luggage boot is also small.

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The car is easy to park and to manoeuvre in tight spaces.

VERDICT

[A well-equipped, likeable compact hatchback.](#)



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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Picanto 'X-Line S' 1.25 MPI five door hatchback.

Price: £14,220 'On the Road'.

Engine/transmission: 1.25 litre, four cylinder, 16 valve engine, 83 bhp, 122 Nm (90 lb.ft) of torque at 4,000 rpm, five speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 107 mph, 0-60 mph 11.6 seconds.



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Fuel consumption: Combustion engine, 47.9 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 107 g/km.