Kia – LOTS of News and Optima Sportswagon PHEV – First Impressions

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Kia keeping all the balls – and other new...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

History and Sales

Brand awareness through sponsorship is vital in these days of a very competitive and sometimes struggling new car market with diesel emissions and uncertainty over Brexit the latest issues to unsettle buyers.

Kia was founded in 1946 in South Korea, and their imports to the UK started via the MCL

Group distributor in 1991, before Kia took control in 2002. Customer awareness of the South Korean brand has grown relatively rapidly since then with record UK sales achieved in 2017 of 93,222 vehicles, a 4.3% increase over the previous record year of 2016. This growth was against the overall new car market trend which saw sales drop by 5.65%. To date this year their 42,344 UK sales are about the same level as last year but the overall new car market sales are down by 6.8%. The UK is the top selling market for Kia passenger cars in Europe and the fifth biggest in the World behind China, South Korea, USA and Russia.

Today there are 188 Kia dealerships in the UK, customers are a 50-50 split between retail and fleet buyers, over 80% of retail purchasers use a PCP finance option and the brand expects a 3% to 4% growth in their new car sales this year despite the fragility of the market.

Sponsorship

Keeping the Kia brand in the global public's eye these days for many people will not get much better than the being the official vehicle supplier to the 2018 FIFA World Cup eing held in Russia from 14 June. Kia has supplied 424 vehicles including SUV models to transport players, match officials and VIPs.



Kia gears up for 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™ with vehicle handover

(from left) Valeriy Tarakanov, Marketing Director of Kia Motors Russia; Jay Neuhaus, Head of Marketing Rights Delivery & Hospitality at FIFA; Alexey Sorokin, Chairman & CEO, FIFA Local Organising Committee; Nemanja Vidic, Football Legend, Former Manchester United, Spartak Moscow, and Serbian National Team Player and Jeong Won-Jeong, President of Kia Motors Russia

Kia's 'Lucky Drive to Russia' lottery will give anyone visiting a Kia showroom in 30 different countries between now and the event the chance to enter a prize draw – with World Cup tickets awarded to the lucky winners.

Closer to home Kia Motors (UK) Ltd has become Official Car Partner to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), continuing its long-standing affinity with the sport.

Kia's first link with cricket came in 2010 when the brand became club and ground sponsor of Surrey County Cricket Club and the Kia Oval. It is also the inaugural title sponsor of the Kia Super League and the first ever Official Partner of the England women's team.

ECB Commercial Director Rob Calder said: “Kia is part of cricket in this country through their existing partnerships, in county cricket and the women’s game both internationally and domestically.

“With an exciting summer of international cricket ahead, we are thrilled to extend our relationship with Kia to cover all international men’s and women’s matches. Their passion for the sport and progressive outlook fits perfectly with our own plans to innovate and grow the game.”

David Hilbert, Marketing Director at Kia Motors “We are delighted to become the Official Car Partner of the ECB, further enhancing our relationship with the sport. With Test series against India and Pakistan followed by the Ashes in 2019, it is a very exciting time for cricket and we are looking forward to continue being a part of it.”

New Sportage

If the public are attracted by Kia’s sponsorship, the brand’s four wheeled offerings include their best selling Sportage mid-sized SUV range which accounts for over a third of their UK sales. The Sportage line-up is being refreshed in August and the revised range will include a 48-volt mild-hybrid starter-generator system which works in conjunction a 2.0 litre CRDi diesel engine. This is the first time Kia has used this technology but it will be rolled out to other models in their range. Other changes to the refreshed Sportage models, in addition to mild bumper restyling and trim and equipment changes include a new 1.6-litre CRDi engine which replaces the previous 1.7 litre unit. The new engine will be available with either 113 bhp or 134 bhp power outputs.

New Ceed



Also due in August is the all-new Ceed. Designed, engineered and built in Europe this mid-sized family hatchback sees its name thankfully changed from the previous Cee'd, to a far more user friendly Ceed but it is still short for Community of Europe with European Design

Designed at Kia's European Design Centre in Frankfurt by a team led by the now-legendary Peter Schreyer, this car is the first of a whole new family of Ceed models to be launched over the next two years. The Ceed Sportswagon estate arrives in September followed by the all-new designed ProCeed Shooting Brake at the end of the year.

Built at Kia's modern and highly-robotised factory in Slovakia, the Ceed Hatchback will initially be available with both petrol and diesel engines, including smaller turbocharged units to help reduce emissions and improve economy. Both manual and dual-clutch

automatic transmissions will be available.

A pre-production version of the new Ceed Hatchback made its public debut at the London Motor Show in May but very recently it received another ‘airing’ on static display for West Country motoring writers attending a Kia range driving event. The Ceed is traditionally Kia UK’s third best selling model range behind the Picanto City Car and the hugely popular Sportage SUV

Kia Care programme

Another Kia customer initiative just launched is their new seven year ‘Kia Care’ service plans which now match the brand’s seven year new car warranty period. The plans are available for all Kia owners and can be purchased at any point of ownership for cars up to five years old. Standard plans cover the first three to five years of servicing but the options then extend to a wider selection which include fourth and fifth services as well as sixth and seventh services to cover the length of the warranty.

All ‘Kia Care’ service plans will now include a pollen/cabin filter change as well as the ability to purchase multiple MOT test fee options at a set price of £35 – MOTs can be added to any service plan or can be purchased separately. Full pricing for the Kia Care service plans are available online and range from £319 for three services on the Rio, from £329 for the Sportage and from £359 on the Sorento.

Kia Promise

Famous for its still industry-leading seven-year/100,000 mile warranty, Kia in the UK are now looking to give customers the best ownership experience with the introduction of the Kia Promise. Echoing the warranty, the Kia Promise brings a package of seven key benefits to buyers of new vehicles that seek to deliver an unrivalled level of care during their ownership and to establish a close and ongoing relationship with their local dealer and with the brand. The Kia Promise is activated after purchase and by simply registering on the newly-introduced online portal, MyKia.

The seven key benefits included within the Kia Promise start with the Quality Redefined, industry-leading seven-year/100,000 mile warranty. Customers will also receive complimentary seven day insurance and £250 Insurance Excess Return for one year. Roadside Assistance is also included – designed for Kia owners in partnership with the RAC and complimentary for 12 months. When a customer registers on MyKia, Kia Roadside Assistance Plus, the highest level of cover provided by the RAC, can be unlocked, which includes onward travel and European cover.

Registering with MyKia will also allow access to Click & Collect, offering simple and accurate online ordering of genuine Kia accessories as well as Online Booking, where customers are able to book their car's next service. When a customer buys a Kia, they receive Family-Like Care. When registering with MyKia and accessing the Kia Promise, their vehicle will receive a complimentary Health Check, wash and vacuum and the customer will be provided with alternative transport, if required. The seventh benefit of the Kia Promise is Accident Aftercare, who will liaise with the customer's insurer, provide a free courtesy car and will exercise the customer's right to genuine Kia parts and repairs at a Kia Approved Bodyshop.

Well that's a sum-up of what Kia's doing to keep existing customers happy as well has pushing for new buyers through high profile sports sponsorship. But what about the models they sell?

Kia's 2018 UK model range

The current 2018 range includes the Picanto city car, Rio and Venga hatchbacks, the Cee'd Hatchback and Sportswagon estate, the Procee'd three door hatchback, the upper medium sector Optima saloon and Sport Wagon estates, the Stinger sports saloon, the Carens large MPV and a raft of SUVs ranging from small to large with the Stonic, Soul, Niro, Sportage and Sorento.

Kia Optima Sportswagon PHEV tried and tested



Having relatively recently driven most of the latest Kia models, and will shortly test drive the new Ceed and updated Sportage models, my chosen Kia steed for the West Country Journos driving day this week was the Optima Sportswagon PHEV. This is a D-segment upper-medium sized 2.0 litre GDi petrol powered estate with plug-in hybrid technology. With official CO2 emissions of 33 g/km it's big on size but small on tax costs, it also looks good as well. PHEV stands for Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle

This is one of four current Kia models which use PHEV or electric power only technology. The others are the Optima Saloon PHEV, Niro SUV PHEV and Soul SUV EV. By 2025 Kia say

they will have on sale 20 models using PHEV, Hybrid, Battery Electric and Fuel Cell power sources.

The vehicle for its £35,145 on-the-road price has good looks, it's roomy with seating for five and a load space ranging from 440 to 1,574 litres (15.54 to 55.59 cu.ft). It has a comprehensive specification including sat-nav.

But it's the technical figures that matter most to PHEV customers, mainly tax advantages. The 33 g/km means that the new Benefit-in-Kind company car tax is 13% and VED road tax is £0 for the First Year rate and £130 for the Standard rate. The Optima Sportwagon is also available with a 1.7 CRDi turbodiesel engine and prices start at a low £22,500 for a manual base spec model but a top spec auto comparable to the PHEV costs £30,800. The diesel models are much cheaper to buy but tax costs more with BiK at 27% and VED at £205/£140.

The Optima Sportwagon PHEV also has a 38-mile all-electric driving range so if your round trip driving from home and back again is up to that figure then it's free motoring but for PHEV vehicles to really be realistically fuel and CO2 efficient they must be plugged in to the mains electricity supply for battery charging rather than just using the on-board regenerative braking to capture electric power.

Officially the EU Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure is 201.8 mpg, but in real-life conditions it's far less than that. My brief test drive using Cotswold country roads returned 69.5 mpg but setting off the battery had only a third of a full charge. Fully charged and with a full tank of fuel the driving range is officially 695 miles but that again depends on the type of journey. High speed cruising on a motorway isn't the most fuel-efficient as there is little chance through regenerative braking to supply more power to a battery which will have used up most of its power early on during a long run. Commuting stop/start journeys are best, country road driving up and down hills also helps charge the system but most efficient are commuter trips of up to 38 miles with a battery fully charged from the mains supply. Matched with a six-speed auto gearbox the Optima Sportwagon is easy to drive and I found the ride comfort more compliant than with the diesel powered version, but not as agile in

the handling department as the PHEV model has more weight to carry in terms of the lithium-ion battery pack.



The Optima Sportswagon PHEV combines a 154 bhp 2.0 litre direct-injection petrol engine with a 50 kW (67 bhp) electric motor powered by an 11.26 kWh lithium-ion polymer battery pack. The electric motor replaces the torque converter in the six-speed automatic transmission. When working together, the combustion engine and electric motor generate 202 bhp and 375 Nm (277 lb.ft) of torque. Top speed is 119 mph and zero to 60 mph takes 9.4 seconds.

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To compliment the driving technology the PHEV vehicle has a comprehensive range of

connectivity and advanced driver assistance features, including an 8.0-inch touchscreen navigation system with European mapping. Android Auto, Apple CarPlay, Kia Connected Services powered by TomTom, a wireless mobile phone charger and an eight-speaker Harman Kardon Premium Sound audio system linked to a digital radio are also standard.

There are an ever growing number of PHEV models available and there has been a near 20% increase in sales of them so far this year. But we are only talking about 57,298 vehicles out of a total of 1.08 million new car sales. Mostly PHEV sales are being driven by their low taxation benefits and fuel saving potential rather than any commitment to improving air-quality.

VERDICT

Clever technology within a family-friendly package.

For: Low tax costs, low CO2 emissions, long warranty, high spec, well made.

Against: Expensive to buy, unless the plug-in facility is used real life mpg will be poor compared to a diesel model which is much cheaper to buy.



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

2018 Kia Optima Sportswagon 2.0 GDi PHEV auto estate.

Price: £35,145.

Powertrain: 2.0 litre, four cylinder direct injection 154 bhp petrol engine with a 67 bhp electric motor between the engine and six speed automatic transmission.

Performance: 119 mph, 0–60 mph 9.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 201.8 mpg (69.5 mpg on country road short test), all-electric driving range 38 miles.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 33 g/km, VED First Year road tax £0, Standard rate £130, BiK company car tax 13%.

Insurance Group: 25.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,885 mm (16.03 ft), W 1,860 mm (6.10 ft), H 1,470 mm (4.82 ft), boot/load space 440 to 1,575 litres (15.54 to 55.59 cu.ft), five door estate/five seats.