Kia multi-model Driving Day – Brief Impressions

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Kim Henson briefly samples a variety of Kia models.

(All words and photographs by Kim, with the exception of the front and rear images of the Stonic; these two courtesy of Kia).

In recent years interest in Kia motor cars has steadily gained ground, as the company's available range in the UK has increased in terms of model type and 'desirability'.

This, coupled with a standard seven year warranty, which indicates the firm's faith in its products and provides peace of mind for potential buyers, has helped Kia become a major player in the UK market, effectively starting from zero in 1991 (when the Pride was

launched in Britain).

At a recent multi-model Kia driving day event, I was able to briefly sample several examples of current models from the firm's line-up, and to drive them on a variety of roads in and around the Cotswolds, ranging from local lanes to main routes.

Venga '3' 1.6 auto compact MPV



My first outing was in Kia's Venga compact five door MPV, in this case in comprehensive '3' trim level and powered by a 1.6 litre four cylinder petrol engine, mated to a six speed automatic transmission.



Although compact externally, this likeable machine provides plenty of space inside, and has a roomy boot, with a separate tray to house smaller items, hidden away beneath the main boot floor.

There is reasonably spacious accommodation for the rear seat occupants as well as those up front, and the interior is smart and functional.

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During my test drive I found that the engine and transmission were smooth operators, and while not a sports car, the Venga performed eagerly enough. It was a good cruiser at higher

road speeds too, with the motor spinning at a relaxing 2,200 rpm at 60 mph.

Personally I prefer a four cylinder engine like the 1.6 litre unit in this Venga (rather than the smaller three cylinder units widely used across the motor industry these days), in terms of smoothness, torque output and also for potentially long engine life – even if ultimately the fuel consumption is not quite as good as that of the smaller 'three pot' units, on paper at least.



Particularly impressive to me was the ride quality, with the suspension coping well with the rough surfaces currently so prevalent on our roads.

VERDICT

Comfortable, spacious for a compact vehicle and very practical. In normal ‘real life’ use it should be possible to achieve around 40 miles per gallon.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Venga ‘3’, 1.6 auto five door compact MPV.

Price: £18,115 ‘On the Road’.

Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder, petrol engine, 123 bhp, 156 Nm (115 lb.ft) of torque at 4,200 rpm, six speed automatic transmission.

Performance: 111 mph, 0–60mph 11.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 43.4 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 150 g/km.

Stinger 2.2 CRDi ‘GT-Line S’ Eco Auto saloon



I next took the wheel of what seems to be widely acknowledged as one of the best-ever looking Kia models, the four door saloon Stinger. It looks low, sleek and dynamic, and all fellow motoring writers I chatted with about this car agreed about its impressive appearance.

In this case my test car was powered by a four cylinder 2.2 litre turbodiesel engine, producing 197 bhp, plus a huge 440 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque, developed between 1,750 and 2,750 rpm. This delivers its power to the road via an eight speed automatic transmission.



For those seeking even greater power and performance, Kia offers buyers the 3.3 litre T-GDi V6 ‘GT S’ petrol-driven version, which produces 365 bhp and 510 Nm (376 lb.ft) of torque, delivered all the way from 1,300 to 4,500 rpm. This scoots from rest to 60 mph in 4.7 seconds, and is capable of reaching 168 mph. By contrast the 2.2 litre diesel variant I sampled features a nought to 60 mph acceleration time of 7.3 seconds (still impressive), plus a theoretical top speed of 143 mph.

However, what about the fuel consumption? Well the ‘Combined’ figure for the 365 bhp 3.3 litre petrol motor is declared as being 28.5 mpg, whereas for ‘my’ 2.2 turbodiesel, it is 48.7 mpg… These figures still make a good case for diesel power, for those covering high annual mileages and especially over long distances.

In addition, it is worth noting that the purchase price of the 3.3 T-GDi V6 ‘GT-S’ works out at £40,535, against the £37,425 for the 2.2 litre CRDi ‘GT-Line S’ as tested. In turn, since the purchase price of the 3.3 litre ‘GT-S’ comes in at over £40,000, there are disadvantageous road tax cost implications too…

Back to the 2.2 CRDi turbodiesel version I tried. At the outset I was impressed by the flowing body styling (which I feel looks even better ‘in the metal’ than in photographs), also by the comprehensive equipment and the high quality, comfortable interior. Disappointing, then, that rear seat leg room is far from generous. By contrast, the luggage boot is cavernous and sensibly-shaped.

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Once out on the open road the dynamic qualities of this sleek machine shone through. To start with, the four cylinder diesel motor is smooth-running, powerful and torquey, with acceleration from rest and on-the-move being delivered quietly and effortlessly. I feel too that the silky-smooth automatic transmission is also worthy of praise.

Handling, roadholding and braking were well up to par for a fast, sport saloon, and the ride quality was impressive too, especially considering that the car was fitted with wide, large diameter (18 inch) sports road wheels.



VERDICT

I enjoyed driving this attractive Stinger; it promises to be excellent machine for covering long distances with ease, while returning frugal fuel consumption figures.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Stinger 2.2 CRDi ‘GT-Line S’ Eco auto four door saloon.

Price: £37,425 ‘On the Road’.

Engine/transmission: 2.2 litre, four cylinder, turbodiesel engine, 197 bhp, 440 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 to 2,750 rpm, eight speed automatic transmission.

Performance: 143 mph, 0–60mph 7.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.7 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 154 g/km.

Niro 1.6 GDi PHEV ‘3’ DCT 6-speed



Next on my day’s driving agenda was the 1.6 litre Niro GDi Plug-in Hybrid (effectively a ‘crossover’ with an SUV-like appearance), incorporating a conventional four cylinder petrol engine and an electric motor, with a rechargeable 360 volt 8.9 kWh Li-ion polymer battery.



The 16 valve petrol motor delivers 104 bhp, and a maximum of 147 lb.ft (199 Nm). The drivetrain incorporates a six speed DCT (dual clutch) transmission. In fact this is an automated manual gearbox, rather than a conventional automatic or constantly variable transmission.



The five door, five seater can be driven in all-electric mode for up to 38 miles, with built-in clever regeneration systems and an easy-to-assimilate ‘power meter’ on the dash helping make the most of the available reserves of electrical ‘juice’, between ‘top-ups’ from charging points. As with other plug-in hybrid vehicles, overall running economy is best when the car is frequently/regularly recharged from mains electricity supplies.



When the petrol engine alone is operating, the car is said to return 67.3 mpg, but the 'Weighted' Combined figure, taking into account the electric motor set-up, is claimed to be equivalent to 217.3 mpg. The CO2 emissions figure is just 29 g/km.

The vehicle is packed with useful equipment and I found the interior to be welcoming and comfortable, with good and head room for rear seat occupants as well as those in the front. In addition, the luggage compartment is spacious and easily-accessed from bumper height.

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I enjoyed driving the Niro, which I found responsive and the transition between petrol and

electric power, and vice-versa, was seamless. The twin clutch transmission also worked well.

I was less impressed by the parking brake set-up, operated by a push-button to activate the brake, and a foot pedal to release it. I found this cumbersome to operate, and would prefer a conventional manual handbrake lever.

VERDICT

Practical, economical to operate (although not cheap to buy) and good to drive.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Niro 1.6 GDi PHEV ‘3’ DCT 6-speed five door ‘crossover/SUV’.

Price: £30,845 ‘On the Road’. (£28,345 after deduction of the government’s ‘Plug-In Car Grant’ of £2,500).

Engine/transmission: 1.6 litre, four cylinder, 16 valve engine, 104 bhp, 147 lb.ft (199 Nm) of torque at 4,000 rpm, plus 360 volt 8.9 kWh Li-ion polymer battery/electric motor system; six speed automated dual clutch transmission.

Performance: 107 mph, 0–60 mph 10.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combustion engine, 67.3 mpg; ‘Weighted Combined’, 217.3 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 29 g/km.

Rio 1.0 T-GDi ‘3’ Eco five door hatchback



My next machine for Cotswold cruising was the three cylinder 1.0 litre Rio T-GDi, in ‘3’ specification level.

Under the bonnet of this five door hatchback is a 998cc 12 valve engine, developing an impressive 99 bhp plus an equally useful 171 Nm (126 lb.ft), provided all the way between 1,000 and 4,000 rpm. The front wheels are driven via a five speed manual gearbox.



It’s a well-equipped vehicle (including standard-fit satellite navigation and a host of electronic aids), which is reflected in the price tag of £17,010. However the Rio range starts at £12,220…

This Rio is a practical machine, with five doors and a good-size boot, and the rear seats are divided 60/40 to enable a variety of passenger and luggage carrying options.

I found the car comfortable on winding B roads with less than perfect surfaces, and the engine performed willingly enough. For the record, it is claimed that the car will accelerate from standstill to 60 mph in 10.3 seconds, and that the top speed is 115 mph. I found that at cruising speeds of 60 mph in top (fifth) gear the car was running happily and quietly.



The official Combined fuel consumption figure is 62.8 mpg, although real life motoring will almost certainly see rather lower figures.

VERDICT

Likeable, lively, practical hatchback.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Rio 1.0 T-GDi ‘3’ Eco five door hatchback.

Price: £17,010 ‘On the Road’.

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, 12 valve engine, 99 bhp, 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque between 1,000 and 4,000 rpm, five speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 115 mph, 0–60 mph 10.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combustion engine, 62.8 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 102 g/km.

Stonic 1.0 T-GDi ‘2’ Eco five door hatchback



Photo courtesy of Kia.

Time was running out and the transporters were arriving to take away the cars when I set off my last (and necessarily briefest) test drive of the day, this time in the Stonic, which Kia describes as an ‘Urban crossover’/compact SUV. The version I drove was in ‘2’ trim level and powered by Kia’s three cylinder 1.0 litre engine, delivering a little more power than in its application on the Rio that I had just climbed out of, and with maximum torque being

delivered from an engine speed 500 rpm higher (1,500 rpm as opposed to 1,000 rpm). However in both vehicles the maximum torque output was provided right up to 4,000 rpm, and both cars offered flexible, easy motoring in both town and country situations.



I liked the design and layout of the interior, and the comfort provided on mixed road surfaces. The car also handled well through the twisty sections of the roads I explored.



Rear seat leg room was limited with the front seats set towards their rearmost positions.



The boot is of a reasonable size, and sensibly-shaped for easy access.



I found that the engine was torquey and eager, and it also gave relaxing cruising at higher speeds, with the tachometer needle showing just 2,750 rpm at an indicated 60 mph in top (sixth) gear. The slick-changing six speed gearbox is also worthy of mention.

Fuel consumption in normal use promises to be around, or better than, 50 mpg (the official Combined figure is 56.5 mpg).

VERDICT

Competent and enjoyable compact SUV.



Photo courtesy of Kia.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Stonic 1.0 T-GDi ‘2’ Eco five door hatchback.

Price: £17,200 ‘On the Road’.

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, 12 valve engine, 118 bhp, 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque between 1,500 and 4,000 rpm, six speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 115 mph, 0–60 mph 9.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combustion engine, 56.5 mpg.

Emissions: CO2 115 g/km.