Kia Niro Crossover Hybrid – First Impressions

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Kia Niro Crossover Hybrid – [illegible]

Chris Adamson drives Kia's [illegible] Niro hybrid

(All words and photographs by Chris).

Hybrid petrol electric vehicles have been appearing on the high street in increasing numbers over recent years but one that seems to have slipped in under the radar is the Kia Niro crossover.

One of the smaller SUVs it first appeared in 2016 and so far has sold over 100,000 units in Europe with two-thirds of these the Hybrid version.

Again with not much fanfare Kia enhanced the Niro line-up (now including a plug-in hybrid and an all-electric model) last year with exterior revisions, a higher quality interior and new colour options.

Kia has never been a brand to produce quirky or outrageously styled vehicles and the Niro follows that familiar pattern.

Perhaps its most distinctive features are the slightly raised projection headlights, now with Kia's ice-cube design and LEDs, and the bow-tie grille (Kia call it a 'tiger-nose') fronting a long bonnet. The grille isn't really large enough to make a statement and gives Niro a pinched expression.



Move round and the tall aerodynamically sculptured side doors are good for access while the athletic rising shoulder is topped by privacy glass for the rear windows and it all sits on some nice 18 inch alloy wheels.

For the latest model, Kia has revised the front and rear bumpers to give a more dynamic appearance while the front daytime running lights feature a distinctive arrow design.

The rear hatch opens up to reveal a modest entry sill and a boot compartment capable of taking 421 litres (14.87 cu.ft) of luggage – none of this is lost to the batteries as they are stored beneath the rear passenger bench seat.



One of my personal preferences on any vehicle is a full-size spare wheel and there is enough space below the boot floor to accommodate this so that’s an extra star in my book.

Not unappealing to the eye there is, however, little to distinguish Niro from an increasingly crowded sector of the market, so potential customers are probably going to be looking beyond its kerb appeal.

Inside there is a particularly spacious cabin and in these modern days an unusually low dashboard finished in a mix of soft touch materials with glass black trimming accompanied by silver or satin chrome highlight.

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Accompanying this light approach is a large amount of glass and a tilting and sliding powered sunroof which makes for a very airy cabin atmosphere.

The vast expanse of the dashboard is packed with instrumentation dominated by a 10 inch integrated central touchscreen for activating many of the on-board facilities including the satellite navigation, infotainment and air conditioning.

If I have a complaint about the layout from the driver’s perspective it is that some of the information at the edges of the wide instrumentation panel is obscured by the steering wheel.

Niro, in top of the range ‘4’ trim grade, comes well specified with comfort items such as dual zone automatic air conditioning, black leather upholstery, electrically operated driver’s seat and heated front and outer rear seats and a heated steering wheel no less.

Convenience features include adaptive smart cruise control, DAB radio with MP3 compatibility eight speaker premium audio, AppleCarPlay with voice control, Android Auto with voice control and a reversing camera integrated into the navigation system.

The extensive safety list mentions intelligent speed limit warning, ABS, electronic stability control, emergency stop signalling, forward collision avoidance assist, blind spot detection and lane keeping assist.

Although only a modest sized SUV, the Niro is offered with an optional Towing Pack that enables it to tow loads up to 1,300 kg (2,866 lb).



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On the Road

Niro’s potential performance output of 139 bhp (141 PS) is achieved using the combination of a 16 value four cylinder 1.6 litre petrol engine delivering a modest 105 PS (and 146 Nm or 108 lb.ft torque) combined with a 32 kW electric motor powered by a 33 kg (73 lb) 1.56 kWh lithium-ion polymer battery pack.

More impressive is the combined 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) of torque which enables the front-wheel drive Niro to pull briskly and purposefully away.

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The default setting is to start with just the electric motor (great for fuel consumption) and with a gentle application of the throttle this can be extended for a modest time period but ask it for more acceleration and the petrol engine kicks in with a nice linear speed progression.

Ultimately Niro is not going to be the fastest in its class but then again this car is more about efficiency and stretching petrol as far as possible and keeping emissions down.

In everyday use Kia would hope owners will be getting close to 55 mpg. On my short test, which admittedly was more fast, open country driving than city traffic, I saw a figure of 49 mpg which is still acceptable if not exceptional.

The official CO2 emission figure of 99 g/k m means it will do well on taxation and can help a family keep its carbon footprint to a modest level.

Along with the petrol electric propulsion unit, Niro is fitted with a six speed double-clutch transmission that in normal operation offers the choice of all six gears and in Sport (which can be operated manually by the steering wheel paddles) knocks one off to give quicker throttle responses.

Switching between the two there is a distinct change in the engine character the Sport mode is bight and breezy for what otherwise appears a rather staid performer.

The bare statistics don’t really do it justice, Niro feels a tad brisker than the 11 seconds it is going to take to approach 60 mph.

Because the steering doesn’t have to cope with lots of power it doesn’t have to be pin-sharp

and in operation the set-up is more than acceptable, crucially there is plenty of assistance to take the chore out of parking with its 2.6 turns lock to lock.

One of the best features of Niro is the ride quality which is in part down to an all-new platform which made its debut in the 2016 Niro. Although nothing exceptional in terms of design, the fully independent Macpherson strut front and fully independent multi-link double wishbones rear layout is accompanied by some finely tuned gas filled dampers that absorb a lot of the road bumps.

Niro is surprisingly stable and provides a flat ride angle on sharp cornering with little movement off the horizontal without getting overly firm or harsh.

VERDICT

Kia started off life as the bargain basement Korean brand but in any situation technology doesn’t come cheap and at almost £30,000 on the road in the specification tested, crossover hybrid Niro is quite a financial commitment.

However, Niro is very easy to live with, offers generous accommodation in the class, has an excellent ride quality; is good, if not spectacular, on fuel consumption, has impressive green credentials and for some the clinching attraction of Kia’s seven year warranty.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Niro 1.6 GDI HEV 4

Engine: 1,580 cc four cylinder petrol / 32 kW electric motor

Transmission: Six-Speed DCT

Power: 139 bhp @ 5,700 rpm (combined)

Torque: 265 Nm (195 lb.ft) @ 4,000 rpm (combined)

Performance:

0–62 mph: 11.1 seconds

Top Speed: 101 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures WLTP): Combined: 54.3 mpg (As tested 49 mpg)

CO2 Emissions: 99g/km

Price (On the Road): £29,270