Kia Niro Hybrid – Road Test

Published: April 20, 2017

Author: Keith Ward

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/kia-niro-hybrid-road-test/



Keith Ward test drives Kia's first hybrid, in the form of the Niro...

While accelerating sales of alternatively fuelled vehicles (AFVs) in the UK have eased with the gearing down of Government support grants, reaching 89,000 last year out of a record total of nearly 2.7m cars, they were still up by more than 20 per cent, according to official SMMT trade figures.

They include petrol-electric hybrids like the new Kia Niro, which require no plug-in charging and do not threaten to strand you by the roadside. They attract zero grant subsidy, but were nevertheless 25 per cent more popular last year.

This is the first hybrid in the UK from ambitious Kia, whose sales here are on a charge, having trebled in eight years and kicked off 2017 with a record first quarter. It joins the all-

electric Soul and they will in turn be joined by an Optima plug-in hybrid as the Korean company seeks a share in a European market for hybrids they predict as 700,000 annually by the year 2020.

The Niro comes in a simple four-strong range priced from £21,295 to £26,995, depending solely upon trim. All sport the same roomy, five-door hatchback body, sized in the Kia stable between the bigger Sportage and a cee'd estate. And all powered by the same new 104 bhp 1.6 petrol engine teamed with a 43 bhp electric motor, juiced by its own 240V battery under the rear seats, in addition to the car's conventional 12-volter.

Transmission to the front wheels is through a six-speed dual-clutch automatic, which Kia rightly claim to be much quieter than the CVT-type employed by other hybrids.

As you drive, the car switches automatically and seamlessly between electric and petrol. Not that you'd notice except for the tell-tale swing of a needle on the dash. From switch-on and for up to the first three miles with a gentle right foot, you can be under silent, fuel-saving electric power. Coasting downhill or braking, charge reverses to replenish the eco system. Press on and petrol takes over. Most of the time the two systems work together. The dash display is not as distracting as some, although your eyes may be drawn to a tree symbol which grows greener the more eco-friendly your driving style.

Performance anyway is not to pump the heart. Ride on these 16-inch wheels and handling are pleasant enough based on a platform developed by parent company Hyundai especially for hybrids. The set-up gives you a low CO2 emissions rating for favourable VED and business taxes while promising 70-plus mpg.

Niro is labelled as a crossover due to its slightly elevated seating position, which is a plus, and raises it into contention with such as the Nissan Juke, Mazda CX-3 and Renault Captur. Leg and head room are good. The rear setbacks divide and fold to admit loads as long as 1,350 mm (53 inches). In the absence of any spare, there's a neat under-floor oddments tray and an inflator kit.



Our Niro came with middle-grade “2” trim priced at £22,795, well-equipped for the price with dual air-con, six-speaker audio with DAB radio, usual connectivity, 7-inch touchscreen sat-nav, reversing camera, black part-leather seats and leather-clad steering wheel and gearshift. Generous safety features include rear-cross traffic alert, tyre pressure monitoring, lane keep and hill-start assist. (There’s an unusual American-style foot-operated parking brake.)

Some would call the standard, one-tone black interior sombre, others find it smart, with high-gloss inserts in the steering wheel, dash and door panels as well as chrome interior door handles. (The range-topping First Edition version gets stone-grey leather and high-gloss white inserts.)







After a week’s mixed driving, the battery gauge seemed to have moved little from its half-way position and petrol usage was recording over 50 mpg – pleasing, if some way short of its claimed 70-plus.

VERDICT

Time to take comfort in your green credentials.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Niro 1.6 GDi HEV ‘2’

Five door; five seat compact crossover

Size: Length 4,355 mm (14.29 ft); width 1,805 mm (5.92 ft); height 1,545 mm (5.07 ft); kerb wt 1,500 to 1,587 kg (3,307 to 3,499 lb), Boot Length 780 to 1,350 mm (2.56 to 4.43 ft); min width 1,030 (3.38 ft); vol 373 to 1,371 litres (13.17 to 48.42 cu.ft).

Propulsion:

Petrol: 1,580 cc; 104 bhp @ 5,700 rpm; torque 147 Nm (108 lb.ft) @ 4,000 rpm.

Electric: 32 kW; 43 bhp @ 1,798 to 2,500 rpm; 170 Nm torque (125 lb.ft) @ 0 -1,798 rpm; 240V lithium-ion battery; capacity 1.56 kWh.

Combined: 139 bhp @ 5,700 rpm; torque 265 N (195 lb ft).

Transmission: Six speed dry dual-clutch automatic; optional manual mode.

Performance: Top speed: 101 mph; 0-60: 11.1 secs.

Fuel consumption: On test 50.7 mpg; official Combined 74.3 mpg.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 88 g/km; Band A; VED nil; BIK tax rate 15%.

Insurance Group: 12.

Tyres: 205/60 on 16-inch alloys.

Service: Every 12 months/10,000 miles.

Warranty: Seven years; anti-perforation 12 years; paint 5 years.

Price: £22,795.