Kia Niro self-charging mild hybrid – Road Test

Published: September 12, 2022

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



The latest KIA Niro 1.6 GDI HEV (Hybrid Electric Vehicle) Grade 4 reviewed by

Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

After being initially launched in Britain in 2016, the Kia Niro Crossover SUV has risen to become the marque's second best seller in the UK and the third most popular in Europe,

consistently increasing sales each year.

Constant improvement has seen the core of the range remain the same but every update really is a step forward in terms of equipment and sophistication for each of the 2, 3 or 4 Grades of trim.

It has also been one of the first ranges to embrace low carbon emissions so it is now sold with hybrid, plug-in hybrid and pure electric drivetrains.

Our self-charging mild hybrid Grade 4 test car is towards the top end of the newcomers' range which starts from £27,745 and rises to £33,990 depending on standard or premium paint finishes.

All use the same 139 bhp petrol & electric powertrain with 6 speed automatic transmission.



It’s longer, wider and taller than the previous generation and benefits from a slightly longer wheelbase as well to improve interior space.

The sweeping lines from the Kia “Tiger Face” at the front to the purposeful distinctive C-pillar are matched inside by an eye-catching highly modern curved display for the instruments and infotainment on Grade 4 and the upcoming Niro EV 3.

Our model had the latest rotary shift by wire automatic transmission selection which neatly fits into the centre console and includes inductive charging for a mobile phone while several USB ports are fitted throughout to charge phones or connect other devices, so satisfying children and teenagers’ needs.



The hybrid actually offers the greatest maximum room for luggage but it’s only slightly less in the PHEV and EV versions.



While the Niro Hybrid is the least powerful of the trio it has a very good range and we achieved close to 59 mpg consumption without trying to be economical, which is often the case with PHEV and BEV models.

The power train was very smooth in action, starting in ev mode and then really seamlessly and almost silently shifting into petrol power. It alternated between both and sometimes ran them parallel as the on board computer and driver's foot determined need and demand.

At higher revolutions you could hear the engine working away while the motor was a very distant buzz and although it was not a quick car it proved brisk and very economical.

Gearchanges were usually creamy and quick going up or down the range and with three

overdrive ratios it was no wonder so miserly and quiet when cruising.



Accelerate hard and the engine note intruded more and joined a lot of suspension bump-thump and 18-inch tyre noise and it could sometimes struggle to insulate the cabin from bad bumps and potholes.

I liked the steering precision and feedback, the good turning circle when parking, lack of vibration or vagueness at speed and the powerful yet progressive footbrake and snap-on/off electric parking brake.

Secondary controls were abundant on the wheel spokes and column but the stalks were not always clearly visible behind the paddles for manual gear selection or retardation assistance

if needed. Console buttons and more for the heating and ventilation just below the curved multi-screen covered additional functions.

The sweeping curved screen housed the infotainment to the left with touchscreen facility and had a very comprehensive list of functions running over two pages while the right hand half was really another pod for the essentials like speed, revs., charging, range and changed display and colours when the driver selected eco or sport modes on the system.

All were very clear in any light, with big digits, good marking and immediate recognition.



The Kia Niro comes with a suite of active safety and driving aids to make parking safer and easier, long journeys more relaxing with intelligent speed control and comfortable, with our

model getting warming steering wheel rim, heated and cooled seats and even heated outer rear seats for passengers.

Oddments room was excellent for a family car, with door bins, large glovebox, console trays and bins as well as rear door bins and seat back pockets. There was only a net over the luggage area and no parcel shelf but the big, wide and deep boot also had recesses each side and an underfloor compartment for essential items.

Access was very good to the boot and the cabin with large openings, a powered tailgate, and easy to drop seatbacks to triple capacity by increments.

I was a bit disappointed by the Niro’s seating however. The larger Kia Sportage seats are well shaped and comfortable but those in our Niro were much firmer, with hard bolsters and squabs and sometimes did a poor job of absorbing the worst road bumps transmitted through the suspension.





Visibility was very good with big windows and good wipers/ wash system, excellent headlights and comprehensive sensors to cover corners.

That firm ride did reduce wallowing and pitching and the Niro HEV's handling was good, predictable, surefooted and generally vice-free.

Like most vehicles, the Kia Niro is rising in price but what you get is also improving and that very long warranty is reassuring and added value when reselling.

VERDICT

It's a sensible family car for today.

For: Very economical, smooth powertrain, very good equipment, roomy, refined, excellent visibility, long warranty.

Against: Road, suspension and engine noise can intrude, seats hard, ride firm, modest performance.



FAST FACTS

New KIA Niro 1.6 GDI HEV 4

Price: £33,245

Mechanical: 139 bhp 4 cylinder 1580cc petrol/ electric, 6 speed auto

Max Speed: 100 mph

0 – 62 mph: 10.8 sec

Combined MPG: 58.8

Insurance Group: 21

C02 emissions: 106 g/km

Tax costs: Bik rating 26%, VED £160FY, £155SR

Warranty: 7 years/ 100,000 miles

Size: L 4.42 m (14.50 ft), W 1.83 m (6.00 ft), H 1.55 m (5.09 ft)

Bootspace: 451 to 1445 litres (15.93 to 51.03 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,474 kg (3,250 lb)