Kia Optima estate – Road Test

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Keith Ward test drives a spacious Optima estate...

GRABBING most attention in auto circles these days are hatchbacks, SUVs and Crossovers, but estate cars continue to enjoy an appeal to both business users and private family buyers.

So while in the repeatedly record-breaking Kia range the new-this-year cheeky little Picanto and Rio supermini hatches give spirited backing to the flagship SUV Sportage, the Korean company expects as many as 3,500 UK takers in its first full year for the new Sportswagon (SW) version of its Optima saloon.

And that is by taking on such traditional load-lugging stalwarts as the Ford Mondeo, Vauxhall Insignia and VW Passat estates.

Where does the Optima SW fit in the Kia stable? It measures around a foot (305 mm) or so longer than its already respected Cee'd SW sibling and offers some 40 to 50 litres (1.41 to 1.76 cu.ft) extra in cargo capacity for a commensurate step-up in price.

The front half is identical to the Optima saloon, also briefly tried recently. Rearwards, the SW's tapering roof and raked rear window opt for looks rather than boxy practicality, but there is generous head and leg room for rear seat passengers.

The tailgate opens high and wide (watch out!) with welcome power assistance on the top GT-Line S we drove. The rear sill sits low for easier loading. There's one-touch folding of the versatile 40:20:40 rear seatbacks into a slightly upward-sloping extension to the boot floor, which itself conceals a handy oddments tray.



Only one engine is available – Kia's familiar 1.7 litre turbo diesel – tweaked for slightly more power, better economy and cleaner emissions. It's in in a stylish five-door body with three trim levels at prices from £22,295 to beyond £30,000. Gears are six manual or seven in a smooth-changing dual clutch, dual mode automatic.

The Optima is generously equipped. Roof rails and tow connection are standard, as are dual automatic air-con, navigation via a seven-inch screen, reversing camera, cruise control, hill start assist, tyre pressure monitoring, six-speaker DAB radio (still subject to regional reception blackouts) and Bluetooth with music streaming. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard.

Up a rung to Grade 3 brings heated front seats, driver's powered seat with memory setting, 18-inch alloys, lane warning and all-round electric windows.

The top GT-Line S trim package on our car stretched to adaptive smart cruise control, hands-off parking assist, a tilting and sliding panoramic sunroof with electric blinds, black leather upholstery with ventilated front seats and heated outer rear seats, rear cross traffic alert, eight-speaker sound and an impressive 360-degree around view monitor, which suggested a camera-bearing drone was hovering above and beaming pictures to your dashboard screen.



The Optima SW feels at all times like a big car. Dainty it is not, especially in town traffic. The electrically-assisted steering can seem vague. On the open road it settles into a stride atop its soft suspension. At 70 mph in top seventh of the smooth automatic box it is pulling a relaxed 1,800 rpm. There's a dual mode to allow push-pull manual shifts if preferred, and paddle changers on the steering wheel.

Noise from the broad tyres on their 18-inch rims becomes especially noticeable at motorway speeds.

Performance is not startling, with a 0–60 time of 10.7 seconds and the overall long-term mpg figure of 46-plus was a tad disappointing against an official combined rating of 60-plus.

To come is a PHEV plug-in hybrid version of the SW to match the £34,000 saloon equivalent,

which can only add to this practical estate's appeal in that growing sector of the market.

VERDICT

A roomy, practical, well-equipped family estate.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec.in Brief:

Kia Optima Sportswagon GT-Line SType five-door, five-seater estate car

Size:

Length 4,855 mm (15.93 ft); width 1,860 mm (6.10 ft); height 1,470 mm (4.82 ft); kerb weight 1,770 kg (19.49 ft); tow max braked 1,500 kg (3,307 lb)

Boot:

Length 1,070 to 1,700 mm (3.51 to 5.57 ft); width 1,000 mm (3.28 ft); sill height 640 mm (2.10 ft); volume 552 to 1,686 litres (19.49 to 59.54 cu.ft).

Engine:

Diesel; 1,685 cc; four cyl; turbo; seven speed DCT automatic; ISG stop-start

Power: 139 bhp @ 4,000 rpm; max torque 340 lb ft (461 Nm) @1,750–2,500 rpm

Pace: 124 mph; 0-60 in 10.7 secs

MPG: On test 46.3 mpg; official combined 61.4 mpg; tank 70 litres (□15.40 gallons)

Emissions and taxation: CO2 120 g/km; band C; VED £160 then £140 p.a.; BIK tax 21%

Tyres: 235/45; R18 alloys

Insurance Group: 20

Service: Every 12 months/20,000 miles

Warranty: Seven years/100,000 miles; 12 years body; 5 years paint; 1 year breakdown

PRICE: £30,595

Rivals (Estates): Ford Mondeo; Skoda Superb; VW Passat; Peugeot 508 SW; Vauxhall Insignia Sports Tourer