Kia Optima (latest version) Road Test

Published: August 25, 2016

Author: David Miles

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/kia-optima-latest-version-road-test/



Latest Kia Optima 4-Door Saloon test-driven by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Sales of D-Segment models in the UK are hard work even if you are classed as a premium brand manufacturer offering such models as the Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes-Benz C-Class and, from the UK, the Jaguar XE. Only the heavily advertised Merc C-Class is in the

UK's top ten new car sales chart thanks to its low PCP/lease finance offers. Non-premium brand models in this sector include the Ford Mondeo, Vauxhall Insignia, Skoda Superb, Toyota Avensis and VW Passat. Predominately these upper-medium sector cars and estates sell to fleet and business customers before entering the retail market as good value, high-specification, spacious used vehicles.

Almost 250,000 D-segment models were sold in the UK last year, which was less than a third of the total achieved by the B-segment supermini models and less than half of the C-segment lower-medium sector models. However the D-segment total was twice that of E-segment large executive car/estate sales.

Currently the latest Optima is available as a four-door saloon but it has the silhouette of a five door hatchback. The estate version is due to join the UK market in the autumn and sportier performance petrol GT-Line and GT versions, plus a petrol-electric plug-in hybrid version, will be available at the end of this year.

Because of its mainstream sales to high mileage company cars users, currently the Optima saloon is only available with a 1.7-litre 139 bhp turbodiesel engine with the option of six-speed manual or seven-speed dual-clutch automatic transmissions. There are spec levels of 2, 3 and 4 and prices start from £21,495, rising to £28,895.

Kia says for the UK market they estimate around 2,200 Optima sales in a full year, once the range is complete, with more than 80% going to fleet and business user-chooser customers. They also estimate that 1,400 UK customers will choose the soon-to-arrive estate, 500 will stay with the saloon and 300 will choose the plug-in hybrid model. Prices for the estate and plug-in hybrid versions have yet to be released.

This second-generation Optima is a global model created out of Kia's US, South Korean and German design centres under the watchful eye of President and Chief Design Officer Peter Schreyer, formerly of Audi. He has been responsible for the evolution in the design of the Kia and Hyundai brands to become globally acceptable to customers, rather than the bland

designs which first came out of South Korea.

Kia is now in its 25th year of sales in the UK, moving from a brand of old-fashioned, budget-priced and limited choice models to a comprehensive line-up which includes the Picanto city car, the Cee'd family hatchbacks, the high selling Sportage Crossover, the Optima and the large Sorrento SUV, with numerous other niche models in between.

Kerb appeal is a major consideration for UK car buyers and particularly it is all about status in the fleet and company car market, that and company car tax costs ruled by CO2 emissions. Interior gadgets such as connectivity are also must-have requirements and Kia's seven-years/100,000-mile warranty is good to have for all users. Purchase price is of lesser importance as most cars are on competitive lease deals or PCP finance payments for retail customers.

The new Optima four door saloon looks like an executive-class hatchback and it doesn't miss out on kerb appeal. The stiffer and more torsionally rigid bodyshell is 10 mm (0.39 in) longer than the previous model, which has resulted in a longer wheelbase so there is more rear seat legroom. It is 25 mm (0.98 in) wider so space and comfort has been improved front and rear, it is 10mm (0.39 in) higher for improved headroom and there is a larger 510 litre (18.01 cu.ft) boot as well. The rear seats fold down to increase that space further.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.



The Optima has an imposing front end with a more upmarket and sleek interpretation of their ‘Tiger-Nose’ grille, it’s less ‘snarling teeth’ than say the Sportage SUV. The grille is flanked by longer and wider wrap-around light units which mould into the blistered front wheel arches. Sharp styling lines, sculptured door panels and the long silhouette with a sleek coupé roofline gives a thoroughly pleasing and impressive road-stance. It looks a solid and substantial car that could easily be wearing a German brand’s badge.

The interior’s modern design is of a much-improved quality of uncluttered layout and upgraded trim finishes, most of them soft-touch. The cabin is more driver-focussed with the dashboard and controls simplified, and with the centre section now angled towards the driver. There is a 7.0-inch or 8.0-inch touchscreen, depending on the spec level chosen, set at the same height as the instruments in the main cluster in the driver’s sightline. The de-cluttering of the switches has resulted in some functions being operated through the

touchscreen but the main ones, heating and ventilation, still have their independent switches which are more user-friendly than having to delve into the computer pages.

The interior is trimmed in black cloth, black cloth with faux leather or black leather depending on the spec level chosen. My grade 4 version had the leather upholstery, nice to look at but it didn't feel as sumptuous as you find in a BMW 3 Series as an example. It is more in keeping with the level found in the much-applauded Skoda Superb.

Every Optima model has a touchscreen navigation function, reversing camera, multi-function steering wheel, dual air con, cruise control, electrically adjustable folding and heated door mirrors, six-speaker DAB radio, Bluetooth, LED daytime running lights and alloy wheels. The mid-grade 3 additions are numerous and include the 8.0-inch touchscreen, electrically adjustable driver's seat, xenon projector headlights and 18-inch alloy wheels.

The additions in the grade 4 version I tried include wireless mobile phone charging, 360-degree around the car vision, park assist, blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, auto high beam bi-xenon headlights, autonomous braking, black leather upholstery with heated and fan ventilated front seats, tilt/slide panoramic sunroof, start/stop button, alloy pedals, stainless steel scuff plates and rear reading lights plus ambient interior lighting. Pound for pound the spec levels cannot be beaten even by the premium German brands where you can severely increase the price of your car by adding options that the Kia Optima has as standard.

For now the choice of engine is simple, there is only one – a 1.7 litre, four-cylinder turbodiesel unit – well below the number of engine options of competitor models. This 139 bhp unit has a 5 bhp power increase over the previous engine and 15 Nm (11 lb.ft) more torque, now totalling at 340Nm (251 lb.ft) from 1,750 rpm. The engine has idle stop/go has standard.

With the manual gearbox, CO2 emissions are 110 g/km, which is 14% lower than before while official Combined Cycle fuel economy is 67.3 mpg, 10 mpg better than previously.

With the new seven-speed dual-clutch auto box emissions are 25% lower at 116 g/km and fuel economy is 64.2 mpg, a betterment of 17 mpg. When it comes to that all-important company car Benefit-in-Kind the manual version is lowered by three tax bands to 22% and the auto is now eight bands lower at 23%. As for VED road tax the manual is £0 cost for the First Year rate and then £20 thereafter. For the auto it is £0 and then £30.

My Optima 1.7 CRDi with the top level '4' specification comes as standard with the automatic transmission and costs the current top price for the range – £28,895. The turbodiesel engine is on the noisy side on start-up, but the noise subsides when warm – both inside and outside the car. With 139 bhp and 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm the unit provides punchy acceleration up to mid-range speeds, but it has a narrow band with the torque ceiling reached at just 2,500 rpm. Fortunately with the seven-speed twin clutch auto gearbox there are enough ratios to keep up momentum without any obvious lag in acceleration response.

On the open road you will notice the gearchange indicator changing down from seventh to sixth and fifth gears almost unfelt, keeping the engine in its most productive rev range. Although it's no ball of fire it will produce a top speed of 126 mph and the zero to 60mph acceleration time is also modest at 10.6 seconds, roughly one second slower than the manual, but the auto box will make driving less prone to numerous gearchanging.

With its selectable power modes, I mainly left it in the Eco setting, and with its stop/start function this engine/auto gearbox combination performed well for real-life fuel economy. Officially the Combined Cycle figure is 64.2 mpg, probably totally unrealistic, but during my week long driving spell I was really happy with the 48.3 mpg I achieved. That was for my usual motorway journeys plus county A/B roads and stop and start in-town traffic, and due to the good weather during my time with the car the air-con was on most of the time.

Generally the ride comfort was good, soft-ish in line with its comfortable cruiser role in life, and it coped pretty well with the poorer in-town worn-out road surfaces. On the open road there was some body roll during cornering but the big saloon was more agile than I

expected, and above all the ride, being compliant, will impress high mileage company car drivers.

VERDICT

If UK customers will accept that Kia is well able to produce high quality cars in this upper-medium sector, the Optima has to be a serious consideration. Unfortunately company car drivers see the Audi and BMW brands as status symbols and more desirable. Realistically the Optima will compete for sales against the Skoda Superb and VW Passat. The Optima deserves a wider buying audience as it is a good looking, well-equipped, comfortable and roomy four door saloon. With the estate, sportier GT and petrol-electric plug-in hybrid versions due soon, the overall Optima range should have wider appeal – it deserves it.

For: Stylish with good kerb appeal, really well-equipped with useful driving aids, comfortable ride, good real-life fuel economy, low taxes, seven year warranty.

Against: Lacks a must-have premium brand label in the company car market, only one engine option at the moment.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Optima 1.7 CRDI ‘4’ automatic saloon.

Engine/transmission: 1.7 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel. 139 bhp, 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, seven speed dual clutch automatic.

Performance:

0-60mph 10.6 seconds

Top speed: 126 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 64.2 mpg (48.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 116 g/km, VED road tax £0/£30, BIK company car tax 23%. Insurance Group: 20A.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000-miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,855 mm (15.93 ft), W 1,860 mm (6.10 ft), H 1,465 mm (4.81 ft), boot 510 litres (18.01 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.

Price: £28,895.