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Kia Optima saloon – Road Test

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KIA Optima 1.6 CRDi 2 ISG Saloon

...put through its paces by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

From being an also-ran when launched in the UK in 1991, Kia has become a serious challenger to the best from Japan and mainland Europe and the latest Optima D-segment saloon is a good example of why their rivals should worry.

Built for a target audience, and not necessarily down to a price, the Kia Optima saloon - a



Sportswagon estate is also available in more versions - is aimed squarely at the high mileage business motorist, typically a rep on regular runs across the country.

That's why they have chosen to give the saloon a straightforward turbodiesel engine and a seven years warranty. I think many will find their way onto taxi fleets in first, second or third life hands because they are very roomy inside and have a good sized if not tall boot space.



With most registrations going into company fleets, Kia has kept the Optima saloon range compact with a choice of two trim levels but with the addition of a seven-speed automatic model in the higher level and prices run from £22,260 to £26,265, all using the same new

1.6 litre turbodiesel engine.

The new engine is down in size and power on the previous 1.7 litre unit but it's cleaner and its fuel economy is better. There are no sporting pretensions about the power unit, it does an honest day's slog from city to city or tootles around town and we averaged over 50 mpg over a mixture of roads.



I found the six-speed manual gearbox with overdrive on the top two ratios had a very precise change but I struggled to master the long travel clutch for every change and sometimes the Optima jumped down the road.

There were no complaints with well weighted, nicely balanced steering and progressive brakes underfoot and the parking brake securely held on our regular test slope.



Secondary controls were all sensibly placed, marked and worked well with a decent sized and very clear instruments' display directly in front of the driver, including the selectable info display for settings.

The heating and ventilation was easy to use and did a good job in the big cabin, filling with air at chosen temperature and backed up with powered windows all round.

Oddments room was reasonably good but the door bins were on the small side and you needed the big glovebox and central console to put things you may need. Those in the back had seat-pockets and small bins as well.

The Optima's boot lid opens high to reveal a good capacity but the interior height is not



great and compensated for by its width and depth. During our test we also sustained a minor puncture and found the wheel kit fiddly to use, so the RAC patrol which turned up inside 20 minutes calling was very welcome and quickly got us going again.



For driver and passengers the access was very good with wide opening doors into a spacious cabin, particularly in the back, and the seats were decently shaped to support and locate occupants. The front seats had a fairly good range of adjustment and vision all round was clear and almost unrestricted apart from the thick C-pillars to the back window.



Good mirrors, headlights and wipers/washers coped with any traffic and conditions.

Noise levels were generally modest with road rumbles and suspension movements the most obvious. If you drove with restraint the engine was composed but press on through the intermediate gears and it let you know how hard it was working.



The performance was adequate but not remarkable, save for the overall consumption without trying to be particularly economical. You have to make use of third and fourth gears, particularly when overtaking, and this can drag down the economy, but once cruising again it quickly rises. Even so it was less than the new WLTP claimed figures for the fuel tests.

The Optima's chassis is really comfortable and it has no vices in the handling department and always felt planted on the road.



VERDICT

You certainly get the impression the Kia Optima's a car you could live with day in and day out, would not tax your skills or wallet too much and takes the rough with the smooth and not trouble you. For many that is the perfect companion on a long road trip.

For: Quality and refinement of the powertrain, pleasant controls, good seats, very roomy in cabin and boot, well-priced, economical and surefooted, long warranty.

Against: Some road and suspension noises, long-travel clutch and modest performance particularly when loaded.



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

Kia Optima 1.6 CRDi, 2, ISG, six speed manual saloon.

Price: £22,260.

Mechanical: 134 bhp/320 Nm (236 lb.ft), four cylinder, 1,598cc turbodiesel, six speed manual.



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Performance: 122 mph, 0-60 mph 10.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 54.3 mpg (51 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 emissions 117 g/km, new VED diesel rate First Year road tax £210 then new £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 31%.

Insurance Group: 21.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.86 m (15.94 ft), W 1.86 m (6.10 ft), H 1.47 m (4.82 ft), boot space 510 litres (18.01 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.