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Kia Picanto GT-Line S – Road Test

Published: August 3, 2026

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/kia-picanto-gt-line-s-road-test/>



Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales) writes... With the previous headline rush into pure electric cars now faltering, there is growing appreciation of what a good petrol car can do for a manufacturer, as in the Kia Picanto GT-Line S.

While some rivals had axed their city cars or effectively moved them up market and therefore into more expensive territory, Kia adopted a policy of keeping open their options for the maximum number of buyers to choose.

So, the entry level Picanto series has been given a make-over for 2026 and the third generation since 2003 has been carefully refreshed. It comes in Pure, GT-Line and GT-Line S trims from £17,095 to £21,245.

Out has gone the bigger 1.2 litre engine and the current six-model range is based on a single near-1.0 litre petrol triple-pot engine with a choice of manual or automated transmission in three trim levels, but you'll pay more tax for the AMT versions.



On top models, there are eye-catching styling changes front and back to the bumpers and more powerful headlights with some careful reworking of the interior to include elements from the maker's bigger cars.

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This streamlined range may lead you to think that the removal of the previous 1.2 litre engine has spoiled the set up of the top models, but that is more fanciful than the feeling behind the wheel of the GT-Line S we tested.

It may lack the cubic capacity of before but its actual performance speaks volumes for the



latest engineering applied to the A-class five-door city car.

Acceleration was respectable if not racy and it easily kept up with motorway traffic with only a pleasant buzz coming into the cabin.

Overall, its economy was actually better than indicated in the official figures issued for the model and I think you'd be struggling to get it below mid-40s. If you did opt for the automated manual transmission for whatever reason the economy might be slightly worse, but I would not consider it a significant drop.

Where we did find the Picanto GT-Line S did struggle seemed to be on gentle slopes or having to smartly pick-up from low revs when cruising, as in having to overtake, and this seemed to necessitate at least two downchanges.

Thankfully with a light clutch and direct slick gearchange, this was easily and smoothly accomplished. The gear gate is well defined and ratios seemed fairly well chosen to match the little engine's characteristics.

Underfoot, the car slowed progressively and smoothly with modest pressure applied, the conventional handbrake did a good job and the steering ratio was tight while the wheel did not seem to suffer from any kickback or vagueness.

It felt agile in town when parking, was steady on main roads and appeared to relish twisting country lanes in the manner of the original Mini.

Where it did score over the Mini was the Kia Picanto's sightlines, which were all unobstructed, through its windows with their low waistlines, big wipers and abundant washers.

The Picanto's bonnet seemed to drop out of sight from the driver and it made me think it would be a good mode for provisional licence holders to learn in.



Inside, it's very good for two in front but a tight fit for those behind unless they have really short legs, but headroom was fairly good. The boot is small and suitable only for a couple of shopping bags but the 60:40 split allows progressive increases in loads. Access was very good.





For the driver the layout of major controls, proximity of secondary buttons on the wheel, column or spread under the central infotainment screen was very good. Dials directly in front of the driver could be quickly read and their content changed as required while the infotainment screen was big and integrated with mobile phones and apps.

Oddments room was a bit on the scarce side everywhere with just slim door trays, a small glovebox and central bin/ console incorporating wireless charging.

Seats were surprisingly comfortable in such a small cabin, with generally good adjustment range, supportive design and even effective headrests.

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Kia has put a lot into this in terms of driving aids and assistance systems, warning buzzers, communication and telephony not to mention the music choices.

For the driver, the handling is safe and surefooted without any real vices and it coped well with different roads.

VERDICT

I really think the Kia Picanto GT-Line S is a car you couldn't fail to like.

For: Agile, easy driving, reasonable performance, good economy, comfortable, clear visibility, long warranty.

Against: Small boot and rear seats, road noises, occasionally lumpy ride, busy engine note.



FAST FACTS

Model: Kia Picanto GT-Line S

Price: £19,945

Mechanical: 68 bhp 3-cyl 998cc petrol engine, 5 speed

Max Speed: 100 mph

0 - 62 mph: 14.6 sec

Combined MPG: 55 mpg

Insurance Group: 8a

C02 emissions: 129 g/km



Bik rating: 31%, £455FY, £200SR

Warranty: 7 years/ 100,000 miles

Rating: 4/ 5

Size: L 3.61 m (11.84 ft), W 1.60 m (5.25 ft), H 1.49 m (4.89 ft)

Bootspace: 255 - 1,010 litres (9.01 - 35.67 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 990 kg (2,183 lb)