Kia pro_cee’d GT

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Kia is best known for its low prices and industry-leading seven-year warranty – now it is hoping to inject a little excitement into the brand image with its first serious hot hatchback, the pro_cee’d GT.

A quick glance at the three-door GT and it is clear Kia has serious intentions, if only from the way that the car looks – and it has taken five years of design work to get it looking like this.



The strong wedge shape is enhanced by bold contour lines in the waist, a wrap-around tail, prominent side sills, an integrated roof spoiler, piercing headlights, LED daytime running lights, red brake callipers, graphite grey 18inch aluminium alloy wheels, dual sports exhausts and red trimmings for the chin spoiler below the lower, wider bumper and deeper graphite black grille.

The appearance is backed up by new turbocharged petrol engine as well as retuned suspension, steering and brakes to make the most of the technical package

GENEROUS ACCOMMODATION

If a small hatchback was designed to go fast, then it is this GT but, at the same time, Kia has paid attention to the practicalities of life.

The 362 litre boot is surprisingly generous for the class with a wide and deep storage area, plus the addition of a hidden under-floor compartment that still leaves room for a space-saver spare wheel.



The 60/40 split rear seats fold almost flat to boost space to 1,207 litres and when they are in place there is accommodation for two six foot adults with spare head and leg room – although the small side windows and black headlining does make it a bit dark and dingy.

Up front the GT has one of the best Kia dashboards to date, featuring textured plastics with gloss black panels and chrome trimming, giving the whole cabin a clean, modern atmosphere. This is supported by large, positive action controls and plenty of additional storage space.

Occupants sit in height-adjustable leather and suede Recaro sports seats with under thigh support and lumbar adjustment which holds you in tight.

Ahead of the driver is a clear and bright three-dial instrument panel that has the trick of being able to switch from a digital representation of an analogue speedometer to a digital numerical read-out with flashing gauges for the torque and turbo boost.

POCKET ROCKET POTENTIAL

Having decided the GT has the looks, does it have the performance to be classed as a hot hatchback?

To claim the credentials, Kia installs its first turbo-charged petrol engine, a 201bhp 1.6 litre version of its lightweight all-aluminium T-GDi Gamma unit fitted with a twin-scroll turbocharger that boosts power by 51 per cent and torque by 61 per cent between 1,750 and 4,500rpm.

There is continuously variable valve trimming on both the inlet and exhaust sides as well as electronic throttle control and low-friction moving parts, while the crankshaft is offset from the centre-line to aid smoothness.

Delivery has been well managed so that the GT accelerates in a linear fashion with no sign of turbo-lag and, as well as increasing output, the turbo also makes for a cleaner burning engine by reducing gas flow and heat losses.

The crisp and peppy response to the throttle is only lacking in audible qualities and is blocked out by a degree of road noise from the tyres. Ultimately, acceleration is only modest against the class leaders, but anything under 7.5 seconds to 62mph is going to be fun to drive.

With a slick-shifting six-speed manual transmission, fitted with a lower final drive, the GT pulls from most speeds with torque rising seamlessly – this steady rather than sudden power input means it’s not as brutal or neck-jarring as some, so should be described as more a warm than a blisteringly hot hatchback.

Kia makes no great claims for fuel economy, which is not surprising as they quote 38mpg. The best I could return was 34.7mpg and emissions rated at 171g/km mean it’s not that environmentally-friendly.

Lower and stiffer suspension with increased damper rebound and compression rates – front damping forces being 10 per cent higher in compression and 30 per cent higher in rebound and rear dampers being 200 per cent and 50 per cent higher respectively – offers a firm but not harsh ride so the GT feels very ordinary and untroubled on British roads.

Bigger brakes – 300mm x 28mm discs at the front and 262 x 10mm discs at the rear – mean plenty of stopping power when it is needed and are backed-up by an array of technical wizardry such as Electronic Stability Control, Vehicle Stability Management, ABS with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution and Brake Assist plus Hill-Start Assist Control.

To go with the composed, if not especially dynamic platform there is a moderate degree of predictable understeer while the more direct steering – Kia having removed its normal adjustable Flex Steer function from the GT – is helpful if not as pin-sharp as some of its established rivals.









COMPETITIVE PRICING

Competitively priced at under £20,000, the pro_cee'd GT arrives in two trim grades (at launch there was a third Limited Edition version but only 50 were available in the UK) where the basic GT model comes with: air conditioning (rather than climate control), reverse parking sensors, six-speaker CD radio with Bluetooth and iPod connectivity, traction control, cruise control, leather steering wheel with perforated grip areas, stainless steel pedals with no-slip rubber inserts, automatic cornering headlights and a multi-function computer.

Adding to this is the GT Tech grade which contributes a seven-inch touch screen with satellite navigation featuring UK and European mapping, a reversing camera, heated front seats and a heated steering wheel, engine start/stop button, rain-sensing windscreen wipers, dual-zone automatic air conditioning with ioniser, automatic de-fog system, automatic-dimming rear-view mirror and xenon adaptive headlights with automatic levelling to replace the cornering lights on the GT.

VERDICT

Kia has already proved that it can do budget motoring, attractive to more mature drivers and cost conscious families and now in the pro_cee'd GT it has demonstrated that it can turn its hand to making a hot hatchback that will appeal to the younger generation.

It certainly looks the part and has enough get up and go to satisfy most needs. It won't challenge the established GTi champions in terms of outright performance – and the emissions and modest fuel economy are going to be stumbling blocks to those looking for a cheap runaround.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Engine:
1591cc four-cylinder turbo-charged petrol, six-speed manual transmission, front-wheel drive

Power:
201bhp @ 6,000rpm

Torque:
195lbft @1,750 – 4,500rpm

Top Speed:
143mph

0-62mph:
7.4 seconds

Fuel Consumption:
Urban – 29.1mpg
Extra Urban – 46.3mpg

Combined – 38.2mpg

Emissions:
171 g/km (VED Band H)

On the road price:
£19,995