Kia’s diesel hybrid Sportage – Road Test

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Kia Sportage GT-Line S 2.0CRDi auto 2.8v

Tried and tested by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Success can be measured or judged in many ways, and one of those is behind the wheel of the Kia Sportage.

It is the Korean's brand's best-selling model in Britain, and last year a record number of Kia models were sold including their globally best-selling SUV.

So it can be said to be the most desired model in their UK range since the brand entered Britain in 1991, but how times change. Some 30 years ago it was a time of family

hatchbacks ruling the ranks of registrations, but the market has continues to evolve, and so has the Kia Sportage.

Sportage came to Britain in 1995, since when the 4WD and SUV sector has boomed and morphed, and today's test model shows it's still evolving as we drove the new 2.0 turbodiesel with a whopping 48v mild-electric motor to assist.

The current Sportage line-up runs to 21 versions with a choice of 2WD or 4WD, five 1.6 petrol or 1.6 and 2.0 diesels, six speed manual or seven and eight speed automatic transmission, and including a 48v mild hybrid system we tested in the top specification. Effectively there are six trim levels and prices rise from £19,200 to over £35,500.



This 2.0 litre unit is a very good diesel-hybrid powertrain, fitted into a very well equipped and styled SUV with off-road ability. It is the first application of Kia's EcoDynamics powertrain strategy offering hybrid, plug-in hybrid, battery-electric and 48v mild-hybrid technology across its model line-up, and this is the launch of an extensive powertrain programme of new models including a fuel-cell electric car in 2020 and set to enter showrooms by 2025.

The Sportage looks big on the outside but it's not huge inside and has easy access and really superb seats front and back, with good adjustment on the front pair and a limited reclining

function on the back seats as well. The bootspace has a thigh-high flat floor, is long and wide, quickly increasing as the offset seat-backs are individually dropped.

Up front the engine is a quick starter, pulls well through the lower gears and is generally quiet until you hit higher revs if you hold lower ratios for overtaking. Left to its own automatic devices and it seamlessly slips through the eight ratios and gives good account of itself either overtaking or cruising – and is able to tow 1-tonne.

The steering has a good turning circle, is well weighted to give assistance in traffic but it’s still a little insulated on the move, even in the sportier GT-Line model, unlike the excellent precision and power of the brakes underfoot and the efficiency of the electric parking brake.

There is some road noise from the big wheels and tyres but the 4WD system keeps them planted on the road at all times and the handling is surefooted if not nimble. It is slightly firmer than other Sportage models, but the GT-Line is aimed at providing better feedback on the road and it does. The electric motor is intended to maximise economy by replacing wasteful mechanical energy with battery power, and it intelligently recharges on the go so there’s no need to plug-in.



Secondary controls grouped on the wheel-spokes, fascia and console all work well and are clearly marked, the instruments are big and very clear with a central multi-function display between the main dials ahead of the steering wheel, and they are clearly calibrated and easy to read in any light.

The central console carries the main infotainment screen and this is also well-designed and illuminated with additional heating and ventilation controls beneath to bathe the interior in any combination desired. It is a good arrangement with further controls beside the console gear-shift indicator and selector lever, including the drive modes.

Oddments room is reasonable for a family car whether infront or behind and the top model also gains rear seat heating.

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Room is good inside and the low waistline means a shorter person can see out of the side windows, while the big windows, very good bright lights and big wipers and all round camera system allow the driver to have a clear view of everything around when parking or emerging from a junction, backed up by overtaking alert in the door mirrors.

Depending on your chosen model the tech packs are impressive and worthwhile, coming as standard on the majority but also available as options. You can, for instance, use the standard 7-inch infotainment screen or upgrade to an 8-inch version for additional clarity.

Generally it does a good job on nearly all surfaces but the GT-Line S can give a slightly rougher ride over really bad bits of road. Body roll is well contained and there's little pitch or dip when accelerating or braking.

VERDICT

It is a striking looking car with a strong on-road presence, an attractive, feature-rich interior, sophisticated powertrain and once you get over the road duty penalty you have to fork out for the higher priced diesel fuel.

Nevertheless, the pros outweigh the cons by a big margin and there is no reason to think the new 48v mild-hybrid will not continue the success story for the Kia Sportage.

For: Refined, sophisticated, well-equipped, roomy, comfortable, quiet, economical, good warranty, range of models are hugely popular new or used, long (seven years) warranty.

Against: Average performance, high diesel tax penalty, not agile.



The Kia UK sales history

Kia Motors (UK) Limited has hit the 1 million car landmark in the UK in January 2019 – less than 30 years after the first Kia Pride was brought to British motorists.

It comes just weeks after the Korean brand celebrated a 2.7% rise in sales in 2018, when the UK market was overall down 6.8%.

In 1991 the Korean brand was launched and 1,786 cars were sold in the UK – last year,

2018, the company hit another record sales volume of 95,764 bringing its overall total since that first Pride to 998,069.

In the marque's first decade in the UK just under 50,000 cars were sold. After 20 years Kia had delivered 372,000 cars to UK customers. The sales-pace accelerated after the opening of the company's plant in Slovakia in 2006 and during the last eight years around 626,000 cars have come to the UK.

Kia's biggest-selling car in that total is Sportage with 241,912 sold since 1995. Picanto ranks second with 191,926 sold since 2004 and cee'd sold 138,253 since launched in 2007.

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

2019 Kia Sportage GT-Line S, 2.0CRDi 48v mild-hybrid, auto.

Price: £36,140.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel,182 bhp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, with 48v electric assistance motor, eight speed auto, 4WD. Performance:125 mph, 0–62 mph 9.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.7 mpg (42 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 emissions 152 g/km, First Year diesel rate VED £830 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax rating 35%.

Insurance Group: 25.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,480 mm (14.70 ft), W 1,855 mm (6.09 ft), H 1,635 mm (5.36 ft), boot/load space 491 to 1,480 litres (17.34 to 52.27 cu.ft), braked towing weight

1,900 kg (4,189 lb).