Kia’s fast flagship Stinger – Road Test

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Kia Stinger 3.3 T-GDi V6 GT S

Kia Stinger becomes the brand’s flagship model…

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The South Korean brand of Kia, launched in Europe in 1991, has moved steadily from budget to award winning mainstream models with long seven-year 100,000 mile warranties and successive years of record UK sales. The brand has recently entered the premium sector with their 168 mph Stinger Grand Tourer 3.3 litre turbocharged five door coupé styled hatchback, their first rear wheel drive and their fastest car so far in the UK.

Priced from £31,995 to £41,140 the Stinger range is not the first Kia vehicle to break the £40k price barrier as top versions of their Sorento large SUV have already reached that milestone. They also have their slightly less expensive Optima ‘upper medium’ sector four door saloons and five door Sportwagon estates in their wide range of models.

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The flagship version of the of the Stinger range is the 3.3 litre T-GDi V6 GT-S twin turbo petrol with 365 bhp and a huge 510 Nm (376 lb.ft) of torque available from just 1,300 rpm. Drive to the rear wheels is through an eight-speed automatic gearbox. The Stinger range also has more mundane engine options with a 2.0 litre T-GDi 181 bhp petrol which is just arriving to market and a 2.2 litre CRDi 197 bhp turbodiesel arrives at the end of March, and all have the same rear wheel drive configuration with an eight-speed auto transmission. The 2.0 litre petrol and turbodiesel models are each available with the lower spec GT-Line and higher GT-Line S spec levels whilst the 3.3 litre model is only available with the all-encompassing GT-S level.

Although the American and Asian markets will be the main sales territories for the Stinger Kia expects to sell around 1,800 of them in the UK this year, with the GT-S being the most popular, and retail customers are expected to take 60% of sales. Most obvious competitors should be the premium brand Audi A5 Sportback, BMW 4 Series Gran Coupé, Volkswagen Arteon, Jaguar XE S and perhaps the 260 bhp Vauxhall Insignia 2.0T 4×4 GSi sports

hatchback variant.

The stunning to look at Stinger is the latest result of ex-Audi designer Peter Schreyer's move to the Kia and Hyundai brands, and that has been further enhanced by the recruitment of ex-BMW M division's chassis and vehicle development guru Albert Biermann joining the team.

The Stinger has an overall length of 4,830 mm (15.85 ft) and it enjoys a long wheelbase of 2,905 mm (9.53 ft) which all leads to an imposing five door coupé styled GT car. Its styling is fully backed up with muscular wheelarches, a low stance, coupé roofline, sculptured door panels, a sleek new version of the Kia Tiger Nose grille, long bonnet, air flow vents in the front lower bumper and lower front wings, with air intakes in the bonnet for the intercooler. At the rear is a sharply raked forward tailgate, a spoiler plus a lower body diffuser flanked by double twin exhaust tailpipes.

The GT-Line versions with the 2.0 litre petrol and turbodiesel engines have a comprehensive level of sports specification including 18-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, sports front seats, heated and powered driver's seat, an 8.0-inch touchscreen with sat-nav, head-up display, parking sensors, cruise control, selectable driving modes, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, high beam assist, driver attention warning alerts and speed limit information as well as DAB radio and the usual Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connectivity functions.

The GT-Line and 3.3 litre GT S adds to this level with blind spot monitoring with rear cross traffic alert, LED headlights, heated rear seats, powered tailgate, 360-degree surround view camera, sunroof and wireless phone charging. The 168 mph GT S additions, apart from the twin turbo petrol engine, are 19-inch alloys, limited slip rear differential, active adaptive suspension damping, uprated Brembo brakes and Nappa leather upholstery.

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Inside the Stinger 3.3 GT S the first visual appearance is of a very busy layout. There are

loads of switches and controls and whilst they are functional, and after a while learning what does what, they are not ergonomically well placed. They do not have the same premium look as the German competition but at least most of the important functions have their own independent controls and are not hidden away to be operated via the touchscreen.

The front sports seats are very comfortable and well positioned although rear visibility through the rear tailgate window is limited due to its steeply raked angle. The tailgate window also misses out by not having a wash/wipe function to clear read dirt. The rear seats offer lots of legroom for passengers thanks to the unusually long wheelbase and the outside two seats, despite the lower coupé rear roofline, happily accommodate taller passengers but the middle rear seat is narrow and probably only suitable for a child. Behind the rear seats is a 406 litre (14.34 cu.ft) boot which extends to a very useful 1,114 litres (40.40 cu.ft) and well able to carry that extra two-person ‘grand tour’ luggage. The quality of the leather is well matched to the door cards and it all looked and felt well put together, perhaps not quite as sumptuous as more expensive German or Jaguar products, but still impressive. You definitely do not feel short-changed either for the high level of specification or the quality of the upholstery and other areas of trim.

Under the long bonnet is Kia's fastest accelerating engine to date, a 3.3 litre, T-GDi, V6 twin turbocharger unit with intercooler. The all aluminium turbocharged direct injection petrol unit also uses variable valve timing for the four valves per cylinder design. Whilst the 365 bhp power output is good, it's the 510 Nm (376 lb.ft) of torque available from just 1,300 rpm that is really impressive, that's the amount of torque from low rpm you get from a sports turbodiesel unit. And the engine goes on providing the high torque right up to 4,500 rpm so the powerband is huge and that means 'grunt in spades' from low to high engine speeds. The top speed is 168 mph but it's the zero to 60 mph acceleration time of just 4.7 seconds which is first class for what is a Gran Turismo GT long legged sports cruiser.

We have to bear in mind this is a powerful petrol powered car and so the official Combined Cycle fuel economy figure of 28.5 mpg has to be seen as acceptable. In real-life driving conditions my week of motoring returned an average 25.8 mpg but it was not unusual to see

29 mpg recorded during longer motorway journeys at the effortless 70 mph cruising speed. Where there is a sharp intake of breath is when we look at CO2 figures, in this case 225 g/km, which currently means a First Year VED road tax rate cost of £1,200 before reducing to £140 Standard rate plus the £310 five years annual supplement of £310 as the GT S costs more than £40k. Company car drivers will pay the maximum rate of 37% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is Group 41.

As for driving refinement the 3.3 litre GT S has Kia's own designed eight speed automatic transmission which is a torque converter type so the changes are smooth, perhaps not as fast as a DSG twin clutch unit in Sport mode, but again in keeping with its GT cruiser design. The transmission does offer up to five different shift and throttle response programmes accessed through the Drive Mode Selector. Gear changes can either be made automatically or for sportier driving moments there are steering wheel mounted paddles. A limited slip differential is used in the rear axle so that torque is transferred to the rear wheel with the most grip.

As for handling and ride comfort, the long wheelbase, wide front and rear tracks and rear wheel drive provides well-balanced handling although the car didn't feel as agile as some of its German competitors. That said the steering has a fast response rack which provided accurate performance although there wasn't enough feedback through to the driver. The ride comfort for the GT S is very compliant and benefits from the Dynamic Stability Damping Control which offers Normal or Sport settings and can be selected through the Drive Mode function.

VERDICT

Overall for Kia's first entry into the GT 'supercar' sports hatchback market the Stinger 3.3 GT S is a brave, bold and accomplished high-tech challenger to already established European competitor models. Currently Kia is using the advertising strapline 'The Power to Surprise' and with the Stinger 3.3 GT S for me it has certainly lived up to that claim.

For: Great exterior sports five door GT coupé styling, high specification, good value for

money, long warranty, impressive performance, good to drive, roomy with good boot space.

Against: High running and tax costs, cluttered interior with unrefined layout of controls and switches, limited rear visibility through the tailgate window, no rear window wash/wipe unit.

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

Kia Stinger 3.3 T-GDi V6 GT S five door sports hatchback.

Price: £41,140.

Engine/transmission: 3.3-litre, T-GDi turbocharged direct injection petrol, V6 with 365 bhp and 510 Nm (376 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,300 rpm, eight speed auto transmission with rear wheel drive and limited slip differential.

Performance: 168 mph, 0–60 mph 4.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 28.5 mpg (25.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 225 g/km, VED First Year road tax £1,200 then £140 Standard rate + £310 per year for five years as the car costs over £40K, BiK company car tax rate 37%.

Insurance Group: 41.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,830 mm (15.85 ft), W 1,870 mm (6.14 ft), H 1,400 mm (4.59 ft), wheelbase 2,905 mm (9.53 ft), boot/load space 406 to 1,114 litres (14.34 to 40.40 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.

Stinger 2.0 litre Brief Impressions…

If you would like to read about the 2.0 litre version of the Stinger, please click HERE to read Kieron Fennelly’s Brief Impressions covering this model.