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Kia's First Quarter Century in the UK – and a Mini Road Test of the Picanto (in highest spec. form).

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Kia was established in South Korea in 1944 building bicycles, then motorcycles and eventually cars. In Kia's first year in the UK market they recorded 1,800 sales, a figure that it now sells on average every two weeks across its 188 strong dealer network.

The Picanto City Car has historically been the brand's biggest seller in the UK since its



introduction in 2004, with over 152,000 sold so far - and demand is now at around 16,000 sales a year.

Currently topping the Kia's sales chart is the all-new fourth generation Sportage mid-sized crossover range - which is high in demand with a 3.5 month waiting list. Steve Kitson, Corporate Communications Director for Kia in the UK said at a media event "We have more than 15,000 sold orders for the new Sportage and we expect to sell around 22,000 units at least this year."

He added, "As for our overall sales, this year we have already sold close to 38,000 vehicles, a near 10% increase over the same period last year. Last year we sold a record 78,500 new cars in the UK and we expect to exceed our target of 87,000 registrations. Customers like our wide range of new models because of their better design, better quality, attractive pricing and seven year warranty."

Kia Picanto Mini Road Test

With an average of 16,000 UK customers wishing to pick-up a new Picanto each year you can understand why it has historically been Kia's best selling model range in the UK, although the arrival of the new Sportage SUV has taken the Picanto's crown for now.

The Picanto is classed as a City Car, and is available in compact three and five door hatchback body styles with 1.0 litre three-cylinder 68 bhp and 1.25 litre four cylinder 84 bhp petrol engines, and with specification levels of 1, 2, 3 and 4. The larger engine has the option of manual or automatic gearboxes.

Prices start from £8,345 and go up to £12,795. With CO2 emissions as low as 99 g/km and up to 130 g/km, VED road tax is free for the First Year rate across the range and then either free or at worst £110 for Year Two onwards.

When it comes to the Combined Cycle fuel consumption for the range, 67.3 mpg is the best figure and 50.4mpg is the least fuel efficient.



Whilst the 1.0 litre engine is best suited for its City Car motoring status the 1.25 litre unit gives the Picanto far wider ability as an everyday car for all types of motoring including long journeys.

That was the model I tried, the 1.25 litre, 84 bhp petrol version with five doors and the top level '4' specification, with its 5-speed manual gearbox. The price is £12,795 but for that the specification is 'fully-loaded'. The spec includes 15-inch alloy wheels, LED daytime running lights, electric windows and door mirrors, central locking, 7-inch touchscreen with sat-nav, trip computer, rear parking sensors, 60/40 split folding rear seats, cruise control, heated steering wheel and electric tilt and slide sunroof.



At 3,595 mm (11.79 ft) in length and 1,595 mm (5.23 ft) in width the Picanto is compact, nimble, easy to drive and most importantly easier to park in our ever more congested towns and cities. It made relatively light work of negotiating the very busy and hilly streets of Bath, the venue for the recent Kia media range review event.

It didn't cope so well with the real-life fuel consumption of 33.5 mpg, well below the 61.4 mpg official Combined Cycle figure, despite its 'intelligent' stop/start system, but it was



closer to the official Urban Cycle of 47.9mpg. On the open road I would expect 50 mpg plus, depending on the number of passengers being carried.

With CO2 emissions of 106 g/km VED road tax is £0 for the First Year and then only £20 for Year Two onwards, and insurance is a very low Group 6 rating. Add to that the seven-year, 100,000-miles warranty and it's a cost-effective package. Most likely it will be cheap motoring, after the initial purchase price has been paid, for empty nesters, a family's second car and of course young drivers, due to the low insurance costs.

With a top speed of 109 mph and a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 11.5 seconds there is enough performance to cope with most requirements. The engine likes to be revved, producing its maximum power at 6,000 rpm, but the low 120 Nm (88.5 lb.ft) maximum torque output is developed at a high 4,000 rpm, which didn't make for smooth driving around town. Getting used to just the right amount of engine revs for in-town driving and the bite point of the clutch took a bit of learning. Too few revs prompted easy stalling and too many revs produced sharp take-off with the front wheels searching for grip.

On the open road the engine performed better and was well able to keep up with fast moving traffic, although the steep hills around Bath needed a change down of a cog or two to keep the engine in its power band; lose revs and you lose momentum. The ride I found to be on the firm side but at least that meant the handling was precise with little body roll around corners, and the steering was sharp.



Outside the Picanto looks pert with a youthful fun-to-drive character. Recently styling changes have included new and more prominent front and rear bumpers, vertical foglight housings and projector headlights. These changes combine with the sculptured door panels and front wings to do away with the boxy slab-sided look of past City Cars. Inside the cabin is smart and improved after the recent upgrades in equipment, including the classier but durable materials used for the fascia, door panels and upholstery. It looks a more substantial and mature car than its compact size suggests so it will appeal to the young and old.



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VERDICT

Small City Cars do have their limitations but the latest Kia Picanto reduces those to an acceptable level in terms of high levels of specification, good quality fit and finishes, comprehensive safety equipment and of course keeping running costs low. Its success has proved its worth in Kia's impressive UK sales growth.

For: Pert styling, high spec good quality interior, agile handling, easy to park, low running costs, proven best seller.

Against: Firm ride, high revving engine makes hard work of slow stop/start in-town traffic, limited rear legroom.



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

Kia Picanto 1.25 petrol '4', 5-door City Car.

Engine: 1.25 litre, 4 cylinder, petrol. Intelligent stop/go.

Transmission: 5 speed manual; front wheel drive.

Power: 84 bhp.

Torque: 120 Nm (88.5 lb.ft) of torque at 4,000 rpm



Performance:

0-62mph: 11.5-seconds

Top speed: 109 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 61.4 mpg or Urban Cycle 47.9 mpg (33.5 mpg on my Urban test drive).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 106 g/km, VED £0/£20.

Insurance group: 6.

Warranty: 7 years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,595 mm (11.79 ft), W 1,595 mm (5.23 ft), H 1,480 mm (4.86 ft), boot/load space 200-870 litres (7.06-30.72 cu.ft), 5 doors/4 seats.

Price: £12,795.

Note: If you would like to read Kim Henson's driving impressions of four other models in Kia's current line-up (Optima, Venga, Carens and Soul EV), please see the separate feature on these (please click [HERE](#) to view).