Kias of Today sampled, July 2014

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Kim Henson drives a selection of models from the current Kia line-up…

I have been impressed by Kias since first having a five door Pride for a week-long road test… That was back in 1992, and at the time I rated the car as a cost-effective, competent hatchback, and which was a state-of-the-art machine in its time.

In fact my findings were confirmed by a friend who bought a Pride in the early 1990s, and has only recently sold the vehicle, which was still running well. His verdict? “A good little car, which proved to be economical to run and very reliable in two decades of use”.

Of course, car design has moved on in the last 20 years, and during that time I have driven various Kias, finding them all to do ‘Just what it says on the box’, and providing good value for money for buyers.

Recently I was given the opportunity to sample a selection of models from the current line-up from the company. In each case I gave the car a run on a mixture of roads in the Cotswold area, including narrow lanes, twisting ‘B’ roads and fast dual carriageways, incorporating a range of surfaces from silky-smooth to potholed and rough…

Kia designers have not been afraid to make their vehicles stand out from the crowd, deliberately incorporating innovative styling aspects, yet also building in genuinely useful practical features.

It’s got Soul



The new Soul. This strikingly-styled second generation SUV ‘crossover’ (with design cues from the Track’ster concept car of 2012, and built around a new, Cee’d-based platform) is larger and more spacious than the model it replaced – which made its debut in 2008.

My first (and main) drive of the day was taken in the new Soul. This strikingly-styled second generation SUV ‘crossover’ (with design cues from the Track’ster concept car of 2012, and built around a new, Cee’d-based platform) is larger and more spacious than the model it replaced – which made its debut in 2008.

The new model is offered with a choice of two engines; one is petrol-powered, the other, a turbocharged diesel, but both types are four cylinder, direct injection units. All Soul variants feature front wheel drive and five doors. In ascending order, designations range from Start

(petrol only), through Connect, Connect Plus Mixx and Maxx variants.

The version I sampled was the Connect Plus 1.6 CRDi. Competitively priced at £17,500 'on the road' (plus £490 for the option of metallic paint), this is powered by Kia's 126 bhp 1582cc turbocharged diesel motor.
When designing the latest Soul, one of the company's stated aims was to improve the look and feel of the interior. So new materials and 'soft touch' facings were chosen, and the seats are said to provide better sideways and thigh support than hitherto. There's also more head and shoulder room for front seat occupants, plus greater space for legs and knees for the rear seat passengers (up to three). In addition, getting into and out of the car has been made easier. Interior noise levels have been considerably reduced too.

Handling and ride characteristics have been improved by stiffening the body structure (with increased use of high tensile/ultra high strength steel) and by suspension modifications (including revised bushes and geometry amendments).

Standard equipment levels are impressive; for example, on all versions buyers will find a DAB radio, 'Flex Steer' variable power-assisted steering and a tyre pressure monitoring system, plus a host of other safety and convenience features.

The Connect Plus that I drove was equipped with 17 inch aluminium alloy road wheels, a high quality Infinity sound system, satellite navigation integrated with the DAB radio and a reverse camera display, as well as many other helpful fittings.

Kia's comprehensive seven year/100,000 mile warranty also comes as standard – and is transferable to a subsequent owner, if the car is sold within the time/mileage limit.

ON THE ROAD

Climbing aboard the new, boldly-styled Soul, I was immediately impressed by the high quality 'feel' of the interior, and its airy spaciousness.

There’s plenty of head and leg room for both the front and rear seat travellers.

The luggage compartment, accessed via a single piece tailgate, is roomy and practical in nature too – although the load sill is fairly high.

The engine pulls strongly and quietly, even from low revs; flexibility is the name of the game with this engine, which delivers its maximum torque (pulling power) of 192 lb.ft. all the way from 1,900 to 2,750 rpm.

It’s lively too. For this diesel-powered Soul makers claim a nought to 62 mph acceleration time of just 10.8 seconds, and a potential top speed of 112 mph.
I found the engine to be a responsive unit, making the car especially enjoyable out on the open road, yet it provides relaxing driving too – requiring just 1,500 rpm or so when cruising at a hushed 50 mph. The prodigious low speed torque helps to minimise the need for gearchanging – especially helpful in town driving and hilly areas.
Having said that, I liked the smooth-acting gearchange controlling the six speed gearbox; incidentally the top three gears all represent ‘overdrive’ ratios.

Fuel consumption promises to be excellent. The official figures show the ‘Combined’ expectation to be 56.6 mpg, with ‘Urban’ consumption of 46.3 mpg. While, in ‘real life’ you may not be able to quite match these figures, the prospects for low running costs are still good.

During my test drive I found the Soul to be comfortable both in terms of the seat shape and feel, and the ride quality was accommodating of all the undulations that today’s British roads typically provide. The car handled well too.

VERDICT

The new Soul is smart, practical, spacious and comfortable, with reasonable running costs – all wrapped up within an individualistic package which stands out among less radically styled models in its sector.

In due course we hope to bring you a full road test, based on a longer time with the vehicle.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF

Kia Soul Connect Plus 1.6 CRDi

Engine: 1582cc 16 valve four cylinder, with variable vane turbocharger and exhaust gas recirculation. (Note: Engine incorporates a timing chain with a hydraulic tensioner assembly)
Power: 126 bhp @ 4,000 rpm
Torque: 192 lb.ft. @ 1,900 to 2,750 rpm
0-62 mph: 10.8 sec
Top speed: 112 mph
Fuel consumption:

('Urban'): 46.3 mpg
('Extra Urban'): 64.2 mpg
('Combined'): 56.6 mpg
CO2 emissions: 132 g/km

'On the road' price: £17,500
(Prices range from £12,600 for the petrol-powered 1.6 GDi to £21,550 for the diesel-fuelled Maxx 1.6 CRDi).
Metallic paint costs £490 extra.

Venga



Neat and compact, the Venga I sampled packs in a great deal of interior space and a host of standard equipment.

My next outing was in Kia's Venga 1.6 CRDi '3' Sat Nav Eco. The Slovakian-built, 13 model Venga range aims to provide family transport within a relatively compact 'supermini' package, based on the company's small car platform which also serves the Soul and the Rio. Although the Venga is a little shorter than the Soul, it has a rather longer wheelbase, helping to provide greater interior space.

Buyers have a choice of petrol or diesel, 1.4 or 1.6 litre engines; all petrol variants with a manual gearbox, and the 1.6 litre diesels, are fitted with 'EcoDynamics', Kia's intelligent engine stop-start system, to save fuel and emissions.

The comprehensively-equipped, range-topping ‘3’ Sat Nav version I sampled proved to be comfortable, and with generous head and leg room throughout. Wide-opening rear doors help to provide easy entry to, and exit from, the spacious interior.

The flat boot floor lifts to give access to an additional handy compartmentalised storage area.

A major feature of this version is the full-length panoramic glass roof, incorporating a large, electrically-activated opening section towards the front of the vehicle. This has one touch operation, with a built-in ‘safety’ function.



In this example, power comes from a 1.6 litre diesel engine that is smooth, sophisticated, eager to perform and frugal on fuel.



A much appreciated feature on the sunny day when I drove this range-topping Venga was the full-length glass roof, incorporating a large, electrically-operated opening front section. Very nice.



The rear seat features a central arm rest.



Beneath the main boot floor panel are

useful additional storage compartments.

Kia's aluminium 1.6 litre U2 diesel engine, which powers the car, incorporates high pressure common rail fuel injection, a variable swirl control system, exhaust gas recirculation, a wastegate turbocharger and a diesel particulate filter. In addition, it is equipped with a timing chain (rather than a belt), to help minimise maintenance requirements.

I found that the Venga was nippy on the road. The engine delivers power and torque in plenty, and the six speed manual gearbox is a pleasure to use.

High gearing helps make the car quiet and relaxing at speed; in top gear at 60 mph the engine is turning at just 1,900 rpm or so.

Fuel consumption should be good. The 'Official' 'Urban' figure is 55.4 mpg, with a 'Combined' figure of 64.2 mpg.

VERDICT

Not cheap, at nearly £18,000 for this (admittedly top-of-the-line-up) version. All the same, compact but classy, with plenty of interior space, and fun to drive.



Five door bodywork; the rear doors are wide, giving easy access to the interior.

TECH SPEC IN BRIEF

Kia Venga 1.6 CRDi ‘3’ Sat Nav Eco

Engine: 1582cc 16 valve four cylinder, with wastegate turbocharger and exhaust gas recirculation
Power: 114 bhp @ 4,000 rpm
Torque: 192 lb.ft. @ 1,900 to 2,750 rpm
0-62 mph: 11.1 sec
Top speed: 113 mph
Fuel consumption: (‘Urban’): 55.4 mpg

('Extra Urban'): 70.6 mpg
('Combined'): 64.2 mpg
CO2 emissions: 117 g/km

'On the road' price: £17,970

Five door cee'd GT



Sporty in looks and nature, the five door cee'd GT is exhilarating to drive yet practical for

family transport too.

My next drive was a brief run in the five door cee'd GT, propelled by a 1591cc 16 valve direct injection petrol engine, delivering 201 bhp. This 'Gamma' T-GDI (Turbocharged Gasoline Direct injection) unit is the first turbocharged petrol engine ever offered by Kia in the U.K.

Priced at £23,000 on the road this GT represents excellent value for money for a genuinely sporty yet still very practical family car.

I enjoyed this model's excellent performance and assured handling. The claimed top speed is 143 mph, having scooted to 62 mph on the way, in just 7.4 seconds.

The official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure is 38.2 mpg ('Urban', 29.1 mpg), with a CO2 emissions rating of 171 g/km.

Picanto



Don’t be deceived by its compact external dimensions, for this version of the Picanto is exceedingly well-equipped, and reasonably roomy inside too; indeed it will carry up to five adults.

Last, but not least, I was able to take a Picanto 1.25 petrol ‘4’ five door for a short test drive.

The smallest model in Kia’s line-up, the Picanto is now available in a variety of forms, to suit different buyer requirements. My test car for this drive was the range-topping, luxury specification five door Picanto 4, priced at £11,445 ‘on the road’.

Powered by a 1.25 litre petrol engine, developing 84 bhp and equipped with Kia’s intelligent engine stop/start system (to optimise fuel consumption and emissions performance), this diminutive but big-hearted car was a willing performer. The test vehicle was fitted with a

five speed manual gearbox (but a four speed automatic ‘Picanto 3 Auto’ is also available). The claimed top speed of the manual model I tried is 106 mph, with a rest to 62 mph acceleration time of 11 seconds.

The official ‘Urban’ fuel consumption figure is 51.4 mpg, while the ‘Combined’ figure is 62.8 mpg.

Among the many standard features found on this model are an electrically-operated tilt/slide sun roof, UV windscreen glass (to reduce the intrusion into the cabin of sunlight, heat and UV rays), privacy glass on the rear side windows and tailgate, ‘smart key’ entry plus an engine stop/start button, and a heated steering wheel.

This new Picanto is a very likeable small car, with a wealth of useful standard features, and it’s better-equipped than most vehicles of its size.



The Picanto’s boot is quite spacious, and the folding rear seat divides on a one third/two thirds basis.