Latest Kia Sorento seven seater SUV – First Impressions

Published: February 28, 2018

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/latest-kia-sorento-seven-seater-suv-first-impressions/



The 2018 Kia Sorento seven-seat SUV arrives in the UK.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports on this latest version...

More models with more specification – the 2018 enhanced versions of the third generation Kia Sorento seven-seat large SUV are now on sale in the UK at prices ranging from £28,995 to £41,995. This makes the top spec version the price list flagship of the brand's extensive range of budget to expensive models.

Every 2018 mid-life enhanced Sorento model is powered by an uprated 2.2 litre CRDi 197 bhp, 441 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque turbodiesel engine and all models use an intelligent 4WD system as standard. Depending on the spec level there are six-speed manual and a new eight-speed automatic transmission to select from.

There is now the choice of seven versions to choose from, including manual and auto gearbox choices. In ascending order the spec levels are KX-1, KX-2, the new GT-Line, KX-3 and the new GT-Line S. All have seven seats with the middle row having a 40-20-40 split and the rear row seats are divided 50-50. The new fuel and CO2 saving automatic transmission is standard fit for the sporty GT-Line and GT-Line S versions and optional for KX-2 and KX-3 versions.



Ian Mathews, Head of Product for Kia UK told the media at this week's launch of the updated Sorento they expect to sell between 3,000 and 4,000 units of the Sorento in the UK this year out of a total target of 95,000 new car sales this year which will be another record year. The UK is the number one country for Kia sales in Europe.

He added that 70% of Sorento sales will go to retail customers and the vehicle usually attracts more sales for top end versions. Around 20 to 25% of customers will choose the new GT-Line S model and GT-Line will take around 20% of sales.

New to the Sorento range is a new auto gearbox which has eight ratios instead of the previous six to cut CO2 emissions from 174 to 170 g/km and improves fuel economy up to

43.5 mpg, depending on the model. The new gearbox provides five different shift and throttle modes accessed through the electronic Drive Mode Select. The sports styled GT-Line and GT-Line S have gearshift steering wheel mounted paddles in addition to the conventional auto box selector lever used for other versions. Top speed for both the auto and manual gearbox models is 127 mph with the zero to 60 mph acceleration time of 9.1 seconds for the auto and 8.7 seconds for the manual.

The Sorento has a long history of global sales and customer requirements have changed since the first generation models appeared in 2002, second generation in 2009 and the third generation in 2015. Now we have a mid-life refresh for 2018 model year as the market further evolves. Traditionally big seven-seater SUVs were rugged work-horses and over time they have become far more sophisticated, capable and more refined as our buying tastes have changed. Competitor seven seat large SUV models include the Hyundai Santa Fe, Mitsubishi Outlander and Shogun, Toyota Land Cruiser, Land Rover Discovery, Peugeot 5008, Volvo XC90 and Skoda Kodiaq.

More refined with more spec and just as capable as an on or off-road 4×4, the Sorento also ‘does the business’ as far as being a workhorse when the occasion arises. All versions have Trailer Stability Assist which works via the Electronic Stability Control System for enhanced towing stability and safety. Manual gearbox models have a braked towing weight capacity of 2,500 kg (5,512 lb) and the automatic versions 2,000 kg (4,409 lb). All models but the base version has self levelling suspension. When it comes to interior capacity there are seats for seven passengers in three rows and when all are in use that still leaves 142 litres (5.01 cu.ft) of luggage space. With five seats in use it is 605 litres (21.37 cu.ft) and this increases to 1,662 litres (58.69 cu.ft) with only the front two seats being used and the rest folded down to provide a flat load floor.

The Sorento’s off-road performance credentials have not decreased, it’s no car derived crossover or soft-off-roader as it uses robust platform components, a relatively sophisticated independent all round suspension system and its Magna Dynamax 4×4 system. Normally this system drives most of the time through the front wheels but the torque is automatically

distributed up to 60/40% front to rear to provide more grip during cornering or in adverse road conditions. For off-road driving the owner can select 4WD Lock Mode which gives a 50/50 torque split at speeds up to 25 mph.



There has been a general tidying up and minor styling changes to keep the Sorento 'market-fresh' and outside it looks marginally more up-market and inside its slightly posher as well. It remains a big, tough looking proper SUV, fully protected with plastic guards around the wheelarches, door sills and the lower front and rear bumpers, plus underbody scuff plates. Inside the tidying up of controls and switches means that they are now logically grouped together, all in keeping with the overall view of improved refinement. Some of the trim areas have soft-touch finishes and there are the usual trim inserts to refine the appearance. The doors all close with an 'up-market' clunk in keeping with its new flagship of the range

status.

Depending on model chosen the layers of specification are impressive, but the latest safety and convenience technologies can include Advanced Smart Cruise Control, Blind Spot Detection, Rear Cross Traffic Alert, Lane Departure Warning, 360-degree Around View Monitoring, Driver Alert Warning and Speed Limit Information Function.

All versions have a digital DAB radio compatible with MP3 players and Bluetooth with music streaming, and now feature Android Auto and Apple CarPlay which offer voice control. A reversing camera is available on all grades.

In ‘KX-2’ form this is supplemented with chrome exterior door handles, a side sill chrome garnish, rain-sensing wipers, black leather/faux leather upholstery, heated front and outer rear seats, dual automatic climate control in place of air conditioning, an 8-inch touchscreen satellite navigation system with European mapping and Traffic Messaging.

‘KX-3’ level adds a panoramic sunroof, LED dynamic bending headlights and rear lamp units, an eight-way power-adjustable driver’s seat, alloy pedals, an engine start/stop button and smart entry system, a smart powered tailgate, a 10-speaker Harman/Kardon premium sound system, a 7-inch TFT colour instrument display, a wireless phone charger, Lane Keep Assist, automatic headlight beam adjustment and a Driver Attention Warning.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The additional new ‘GT-Line’ model is based on the ‘KX-2’ but is distinguished by a smart key and engine start/stop button, eight-way power-adjustable front seats, a 7-inch LCD supervision cluster, Lane Keep Assist, Speed Limit Information Function and a Driver Attention Warning. The new ‘GT-Line S’ additionally has the Smart Park Assist system, 360-degree Around View Monitor, Adaptive Smart Cruise Control, 10-way power-adjustable driver’s seat with memory function, ventilated front seats, solar glass and rear side window blinds, a panoramic sunroof, Blind Spot Detection, Rear Cross Traffic Alert, Autonomous Emergency Braking and the 10-speaker Harman/Kardon premium sound system.

At the media launch I took the opportunity to drive the top of the range GT-Line S version which is fitted as standard with the new automatic gearbox and of course all-wheel drive comes as standard. This version is priced at £41,995. With an overall length of 4,800 mm (15.75 ft), a width of 1,890 mm (6.20 ft) and a height of 1,690 mm (5.54 ft), the revised Sorento is an imposing vehicle and its refined styling changes give it noticeable kerb appeal, justifying its relatively higher price – and the added driving support and connectivity functions are useful additions.



The revised 2.2 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel engine with 197 bhp and 441 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,750 rpm is a strong and responsive unit and its sounds relatively refined. It works well with the smooth changing eight-speed automatic gearbox. The down-changes are not as quick as some twin-clutch units but for most users that isn't an issue, it's refinement that counts. The various driving mode settings are useful as well.

Top speed is 127 mph and the zero to 60 mph acceleration time is 9.1 seconds. The Combined Cycle figure is 43.5 mpg and on my brief test drive around The Chilterns and the traffic-busy fashionable towns of Marlow and Henley-on-Thames the real-life figure was 36.3 mpg, not bad for such a large and capable vehicle. However the CO2 emissions of 170 g/km are on the high side so VED First Year road tax is currently until the end of March this year £500 reducing to £140 for the second year onwards and Benefit-in-Kind company car tax is currently a high 36%. For a new Sorento registered from April this year those costs increase to £830 for the new First Year rate for diesel cars with this CO2 figure but continue at £140 for the second year onwards. The BiK tax goes up to the maximum 37% rate.

Impressive was the well-balanced handling and comfortable ride qualities over most surfaces, although the large 19-inch alloy wheels are less capable of dealing with poorer road surfaces. The handling during higher speed cornering was well controlled with plenty of predictable grip but more feedback from the steering would be beneficial. In short, apart from the tax costs, there is nothing really to dislike about this top spec Sorento and the lesser specced versions are equally appealing but significantly cheaper.

VERDICT

The latest Sorento is a notable move by the confident Kia brand now confidently edging towards competing with the longer established premium brands in this market sector. As their advertising strapline says ‘Kia the Power to Surprise’.

For: Smartly styled large SUV with seven seats, high level of specification, refreshed upmarket good quality interior, capable on/off road driving, popular tow vehicle.

Against: High CO2 tax costs now and increasing from April, less costly lower spec models offer the same ability and space but with lower running costs, large 19-inch wheels deal less ably with poor road surfaces, lack of steering feedback.



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

Kia Sorento 2.2 CRDi GT-Line S auto AWD, seven seat large SUV.

Price: £41,995.

Engine/transmission: 2.2 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel 197 bhp, 441 Nm (325 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, eight speed auto, 4WD.

Performance: 127 mph, 0–60 mph 9.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 43.5 mpg (36.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 170 g/km, current VED £500/140, BiK tax 36% but for a new Sorento registered from April these increase to £830 First Year rate and BiK goes up to 37%.

Insurance Group: 25.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,800 mm (15.75 ft), W 1,890 mm (6.20 ft), H 1,690 mm (5.54 ft), boot/load space 142 to 1,662 litres (5.01 to 58.69 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,000 kg (4,409 lb), five doors/seven seats.