New Kia Rio First Impressions

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Keith Ward samples the 2017 Rio from Kia...

(Note from Kim: Wheels-Alive is deliberately covering the new Rio from two different perspectives, offered purely in alphabetical order. Therefore, in addition to read Keith's assessement, for David Miles' equally insightful thoughts, please click HERE).

Although vastly overshadowed in the UK by its Sportage and c'eed stablemates, the Rio small hatchback is actually Kia's global best-seller, now into its fourth generation. Some may remember its predecessor, the Pride, as a joint project with Ford and Mazda.

Here, the Rio accounts currently for around a sixth of the Korean company's sales, which hit a new record of 89,000-plus in 2016 and are targeted at 100,000 by the year 2020 on the back of a promised further crop of new models.

The bigger and roomier all-new Rio, a collaboration between design teams in Korea, Germany and the USA, sports a deal more style, which you might say was overdue.

It has been given a contemporary twist externally by its sculpted wrap-around halogen headlights with cornering capability and its U-shaped LED running lights, as well as a wider aspect to its Kia hallmark “tiger nose” front grille.

Tech-wise, features such as radar-operated automatic emergency braking with pedestrian recognition, also Android Auto and Apple CarPlay smartphone integration become available in what is a Fiesta-sized competitor. USB ports front and rear are claimed to be a first-in-class. Instruments and a reduced number of switches set around a typical central screen are clear and easily workable.



The boot floor is wide and deep, sitting a good 260 mm (10 inches) below the rear sill. A claimed 325 litres (11.47 cu.ft) capacity, up by almost 13 per cent and expandable to 980 litres (34.60 cu.ft), exceeds that of the Ford sector leader. With the 60/40 divided rear seatbacks flopped not completely down, our tape showed items up to 1,300 mm (51 inches) long become transportable. Seats up, leg and head room should allow a six-footer to sit behind himself.

A 10-strong range in five-door form only at prices from £11,995 to £17,445 offers a choice of four new-to-Rio engines, three gearboxes and four trim levels “1” rising to “3”, topped by a limited-run “First Edition” variant in the all-new five-door hatchback body.



Standard are air-con, electric front windows and heated door mirrors, Bluetooth and hill-start assist. All versions above entry-level, from £13,745 up, come with automatic

emergency braking, lane departure warning if you wander, reversing camera, cruise control, colour screen and DAB radio. Sat-nav comes in at £16,295 with level "3".

On the road, our pick of three versions available for day-long testing on a variety of routes west of London happened to be the £17,445 flagship 1.0 litre T-GDi with that topmost "First Edition" trim – 17-inch alloys, smart key entry, engine start button, stainless steel pedals, black and red imitation leather seats and LED rear lights.

Its little turbocharged three-cylinder engine in 118 bhp tune was peppiest of all (0–60 in 9.8 seconds) and, mated to a willing six-speed manual box, seemed notably more refined than its five-speed, 99 bhp counterpart, stepping down a trim level to "3" at £16,295, in which a degree of rumble and thump on country roads became evident.

The new Rio boasts a stiffer and safer body shell, but the suspension is "similar" to before, albeit with "Extensive work to enhance comfort and driver enjoyment", say Kia.

Most economical of our three on paper was the "3"-trim £17,245 1.4 CRDi 89 bhp four cylinder diesel, emitting a tax-beating CO2 of 98 g/km and claiming a 74.3 mpg "average". But on the road it was recording an overall 50.3 mpg, against the mid-40s showing of the two petrols. And you would have to brave the current anti-diesel campaign.

Note there is a 76 bhp version of this engine, credited with 80.7 mpg average mpg, with basic "1" trim at £13,495, not available for testing on the day.

VERDICT

If not exactly Carnival time for the new Rio, a welcome step-up.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Rio 1.0 T-GDi 5-door hatchback First Edition.

Tape: Length 4,075 mm (13.37 ft); width 1,725 mm (5.66 ft); height 1,445 mm (4.74 ft); kerb weight 1,160 – 1,248 kg (2,557 – 2,751 lb); Boot Length 700 to 1,300 mm (2.30 – 4.26 ft); width 1,050 mm (3.44 ft); vol 325 to 980 litres (11.47 to 34.60 cu.ft).

Engine: Petrol; 998 cc; three cyl; turbo; six speed manual; ISG stop-start.

Power: 118 hp @ 6,000 rpm; max torque 126 lb ft (171 Nm) @ 1,500 – 4,000 rpm.

Pace: 118 mph; 0–60 mph in 9.8 secs.

MPG: On test 44.6; Kia average 60.1; tank 45 litres (9.90 gallons).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 107 g/km; band B; VED Nil then £20.

Warranty: Seven years.

PRICE: £17,445.

Rivals (5 door at prices from): Ford Fiesta (£11,175); Skoda Fabia (£11,155); Polo S (£12,265); SEAT Ibiza Sol (£12,690); Vauxhall Corsa 1.4 Design (£12,480).