New Kia Sportage Road Test

Published: May 25, 2016

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/new-kia-sportage-first-impressions-2/



Kia’s All New Sportage Mid-Sized SUV First Drive.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

SUVs, Crossovers, dual purpose and 4x4s in all sizes are definitely high in demand, being the best-selling new car class in Europe and in the UK they make up the third largest sales sector with 355,118 registrations last year – a rise of 21% over 2014.

Demand is up again this year following the introduction of even more new or updated models. Kia has recently introduced their fourth generation Sportage mid-sized Crossover SUV and it continues to be their best selling model range, claiming almost 30% of their 78,489 record total sales last year.

The new Sportage range costs from £17,995 and goes up to £30,710. Such a wide range of prices covers a wide range of models that are all five door vehicles, seating five people. There are 18 versions, based on four engine options with five different power outputs, and five trim levels badged 1,2,3,4 and GT-Line.

The engine choices are, depending on the spec level, 1.6 GDi 130 bhp petrol and 1.7 CRDi 114 bhp turbodiesel with front wheel drive. Four wheel drive versions have the choice of T-GDi 174 bhp turbo petrol and the 2.0 litre CRDi turbodiesel with 134 or 182 bhp power outputs. Whilst a six-speed manual gearbox is available across the range, the T-GDI has a seven-speed dual clutch auto and 2.0 litre diesels have a six-speed torque converter auto option.

The most likely best selling version, because of its very competitive price, high spec and lowest CO2 emissions in the range of 119 g/km, will be the 1.7 CRDi 114 bhp turbodiesel manual with level 2 specification, priced at £22,050, and that was my test drive version.

Competition is strong in this mid-sized Crossover/SUV sector where the market leader in the UK remains the Nissan Qashqai but also includes the Ford Kuga, Toyota RAV4, Mitsubishi ASX, VW's forthcoming new Tiguan, the sister car to the Sportage – the Hyundai Tucson , Honda HR-V, the increasingly popular Renault Kadjar, plus the Suzuki S-Cross and Vitara models. There are others and more new additions to come from SEAT and Skoda. Moving up in brand desirability the Land Rover Discovery Sport, Range Rover Evoque, BMW X1, Audi

Q3 and the Mercedes GLA are also more costly alternatives

Crossovers/SUVs are the new generation of family cars of choice, so the new Sportage is competitive for its price, has a high specification and most of all Kia's industry leading seven-year 100,000-mile warranty.



Not to be overlooked is the kerb-appeal, these cars have to look smart, and it is a big part of the desirability so they must look like an SUV. The Sportage does that with its bold stance, wide wheelarches, rising waistline and coupé roofline. The front is dominated by a wide interpretation of Kia's 'tiger-nose' main grille. For me that is not the nicest front face on the market, but it is a matter of choice. Either side of the prominent bonnet are elongated headlamps which extend along the top edges of the front wings.

The new Sportage is 40 mm (1.57 in) longer than the outgoing model, and that has allowed a 30 mm (1.18 in) increase in the wheelbase length, which gives 16 mm (0.63 in) more legroom in the front and more legroom for the three rear seat passengers. With all five seats in position there are 491 litres (17.34 cu.ft) of boot space and with the split rear seat backs folded forward this goes up to 1,480 litres (52.27 cu.ft). For good measure the rear sill into the boot has been lowered by 47 mm (1.85 in) to make loading easier.

The seats now offer more padding for improved comfort and the interior has received an overall upgrade with soft-feel materials, although there is still some hard plastic trim evident. The fascia panel has a 7.0 or 8.0-inch touchscreen, depending on the spec level, positioned at its centre, and below that are easy to use heating and ventilation controls. A large console storage box is positioned between the front seats, and acts as an armrest.

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The touchscreen operates the sat-nav, integrated reversing camera and connectivity services. The ‘2’ level of specification also adds 17-inch alloy wheels, roof rails, privacy glass, premium cloth upholstery, electrically folding door mirrors, reversing sensors, automatic lights and wipers, dual automatic air-con, lane keep assist, auto high beam LED headlights and speed limiter. Carried up from the base ‘1’ level are items such as electrically operated front and rear windows, front fog lights, cornering lights, heated door mirrors, DAB radio, Bluetooth, trailer stability control, hill-start assist, downhill brake control and cruise control. As I said earlier the new Sportage scores on price, a high level of specification and its long warranty and perhaps its good looks. Add in better interior space and it is a compelling package.

When we get to the engine, it’s more evolution than revolution…



The latest upgrades for the 1.7 litre CRDi turbodiesel EU6 compliant engine show it to be over 7 mpg more fuel-efficient in the Combined Cycle mode and the CO2 emissions are lowered by 16 g/km. This unit still only produces a modest 114 hp with 280 Nm (206.52 lb.ft) of torque developed from only 1,250 rpm. This torque developed from low engine rpm means the unit is responsive when accelerating from low engine speeds, and remains strong up to about 3,000 rpm before it runs out of 'grunt'. This will not matter for most users as the six-speed manual gearbox has ratios well matched with the power available, so even when cruising at 70 mph it is still in its most efficient powerband.

The engine is not the most refined in this sector, it can growl under load and clatters on start-up when cold; more workhorse than thoroughbred. However, with a top speed of 109 mph and a zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 11.1 seconds it gets the job done and without

fuss. The official Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 61.4 mpg and my week long test driving covered a motorway journey, local A/B country roads and some in-town stop-start traffic, for which the overall real-life figure was 47.2 mpg which I would happily lived with. It was nowhere near the official figure but then when does that happen? Not often.

With CO2 emissions of 119 g/km, the VED road tax cost is £0 for the First Year rate and then only £30 for Year Two onwards. You cannot grumble at that. Company car drivers will pay 23% Benefit-in-Kind tax. I can see why over half of the customers buying a Sportage will opt for this engine.

When it comes to handling the new Sportage is middle of the road in its class in this two wheel drive form. It does things well enough but sets no new standards. The steering is well-weighted but gives little feedback. The suspension is on the firm side and fidgets around on poorer road surfaces, giving a choppy ride at times. Road noise intrusion is notable especially over expansion joints in motorway surfaces and there is some cornering body-roll evident even at modest speeds. With the front wheel drive model I tried cornering understeer was evident due to its nose-heavy weight distribution. I imagine the four wheel drive versions will have a better handling balance and of course more rear end grip.

VERDICT

These slight criticisms should not really detract from the main point – the proven appeal the Sportage offers for most customers. All they want is value for money, cost-effective motoring wrapped up in a high-spec stylish package and covered by a long warranty. So it ticks all those boxes; it is not perfect, but as its sales prove it is fit-for-purpose.

For: Very good value for money given its high standard specification, low running costs, smart design, practical accommodation, long warranty.

Against: Firm and choppy ride at times, road noise intrusion, modest engine performance.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Kia Sportage 1.7 CRDi ‘2’ manual.

Engine: 1.7 litre, 4-cylinder turbodiesel.

Transmission: 6-speed manual, front wheel drive:

Power: 114 bhp.

Torque: 280 Nm (206.5 lb.ft) of torque from 1,250 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 11.1 seconds

Top speed:109 mph, 0-62 mph 11.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 61.4 mpg (47.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED road tax £0/£30, BIK company car tax 23%. Insurance Group: 13E.

Warranty: 7 years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,480 mm (14.70 ft), W 1,855 mm (6.09 ft), H 1,645 mm (5.40 ft), boot/load space 491 to 1,480 litres (17.34 to 52.27 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,400 kg (3,086 lb), 5 doors/5 seats.

Price: £22,050.