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New Kia Stonic compact SUV – News and First Impressions

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... And still new compact SUVs keep coming. Kia's Stonic here in a week.
by David Miles (Miles Better News @milesbnews)
News

Sales of SUVs of all sizes have reached record levels in Europe and the UK, and seemingly every week an additional new model joins the market place.

The B-segment 'supermini' size area of the SUV market is the fastest growing and sales are expected to reach 2.2 million units a year in Europe for 2020. To put that figure in context, it's not far off the current annual total for the UK's new car sales.



The latest compact SUV newcomer is the Kia Stonic, priced from £16,295 to £20,495, which went on sale yesterday Monday 23 October.

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Paul Philpott, President and CEO for Kia Motors UK and Northern Ireland told me at last week's Stonic media launch event that the UK's B SUV market sector has a predicted growth to around 240,000 units this year with a further 18% growth next year. He added that the C-segment of larger SUVs will be around 380,000 units this year and a 15% expected growth next year. This makes the B-segment SUV the fastest growing sector of UK new car sales and the C-sector SUV the second largest.

He added, regarding the new Stonic, "We have a sales target of around 10,000 units next year but this could be 15,000 and as the vehicle are built in South Korea on the same platform as the new Rio supermini sized hatchback we can build as many as demand dictates".

He said "But the strength of the Kia brand are our high residual values, I don't want unsold cars sat in fields through oversupply. This year we expect our overall UK new car sales to reach a record total of 92,500 units and we should reach 100,000 units in two to three years time. But that depends on the economic climate which currently is uncertain due to the implications of Brexit and the potential for higher interest rates which could affect new car sales".

With regard to the number of UK dealerships he said, "Currently we have 190 and our 191st will be one in Abergavenny in Wales, which opens in January. We have three or four more open points and we have the possibility of adding six or seven more in the future as we expand".

Views

The Kia Stonic model line-up at launch offers three engine options and two trim lines. All



are two wheel drive with no four wheel drive or 'Grip Control' type added traction options.

The engines choices are a normally aspirated 1.4 litre, four cylinder petrol unit with 98 bhp, a 1.0 litre, three cylinder T-GDi turbo direct injection petrol unit with 118 bhp and a 1.6 litre, four cylinder CRDi turbodiesel with 108 bhp. The trim and equipment levels are Stonic '2' and Stonic First Edition.

Monica Forno, Kia UK's product specialist for Stonic said, "60% of UK sales will go to retail customers, 60% of customers will choose the '2' grade but the 1,000 advance orders show a higher proportion of demand for First Edition models but we expect the '2' grade to be the most popular overall in the long term. When it comes to the choice of engines 57% will opt for the 1.0 litre T-GDi petrol unit, 35% for diesel and 8% for the 1.4 litre petrol engine". She added that currently there is no automatic gearbox option but a seven-speed DCT, twin clutch auto will be available next summer, paired with the 1.0 T-GDi engine.

Long-term the single best selling version is predicted to be the 1.0 litre T-GDi '2' priced at £16,995. All versions are covered by Kia's seven year/100,000 mile warranty and Care 3 and Care 3 Plus servicing packages for retail customers. Like the warranty, these are transferrable to new owners if the car is sold before they expire.

Although the Stonic compact SUV is built on the same platform and uses some of the same powertrains as the Rio 'supermini' sized hatchback launched earlier this year, it is a shade longer at 4,140 mm (13.58 ft), and marginally wider with a slightly larger boot of 352 litres (12.43 cu.ft) which expands to 1,155 litres (40.79 cu.ft) with the 60/40 split rear seat backs folded down. Styling wise it's 70 mm (2.76in) taller than the Rio and rides 42 mm (1.65 in) higher to give it its mild SUV stance. It has the usual SUV-style cladding for the lower section of the front and rear bumpers with skid plates, cladded wheelarches, lower door sections and sills. At the front is the Kia family design 'tiger-nose' and the sides have sculptured panels to maintain the cars rugged go-anywhere looks. There is a wide range of eye-catching bodywork colours and the First Edition specification offers eight two-tone colour combinations which include black, red, lime green and orange roof options.



Whilst the Stonic is a marginally taller SUV styled five door hatchback I'm not sure there is enough styling differentiation between it and the Rio, after all customers like chunky SUV styling.

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Inside, the horizontal dashboard styling emphasises width and the taller stance does improve visibility to the outside. The dashboard has upper information and lower control levels and it's generally logically laid out, but there are numerous buttons and toggle switches on the chunky steering wheel to deal with. Both spec levels have lots of hard plastic trim and linings although the First edition does have additional bright coloured trim which lifts the dark interior.

Electronic Stability Control and Vehicle Stability Management with the latter linked to Torque Vectoring, Straight Line Stability and Cornering Brake Control are fitted. All versions also have Hill-start Assist. Autonomous Emergency Braking and Lane Departure Warning are standard in the First Edition and optional on grade '2' as part of an Advanced Driving Assistance Pack. The Lane Departure Warning System is linked to Driver Attention Warning and High Beam Assist. The First Edition also has Blind Spot Detection with Rear Cross Traffic Alert.

There is a 7.0-inch display with a DAB radio and MP3 compatibility in grade '2', and in the First Edition this is upgraded to a 7.0-inch touchscreen navigation and infotainment system featuring Kia Connected Services with TomTom, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay. Smartphone integration is standard across the range.

All models have 17-inch alloy wheels, air conditioning, all-round electric windows, roof rails, rear parking sensors, remote locking, electrically adjustable heated door mirrors, a 3.5-inch supervision cluster, Bluetooth with music streaming, automatic headlight control, bi-function projection headlamps and cornering lights and LED daytime running lights. There are body-coloured bumpers, door mirror casings and door handles and a six-speaker audio



system.

The First Edition adds a smart key entry system and engine start/stop button, stainless steel pedals, black cloth and grey faux leather upholstery with colour accents, automatic air conditioning, LED rear lights, privacy glass on the rear side windows and tailgate, heated front seats, D-shaped steering wheel, chrome window trim and interior door handles and a dual-height luggage floor. First Edition specification costs £2,700 more than the '2' grade models.

During on-the-road driving on some main and more winding country roads around Berkshire and Hampshire, the low speed ride, especially with the 1.0-litre lighter weight petrol engine, was firm and unsettled over poorer road surfaces. Smoother A-class roads improved the ride comfort and handling but overall it lags behind competitor models for agility and driving refinement, offered by such as the Citroën C3 Aircross, Peugeot 2008, Renault Captur and Vauxhall Crossland X. The handling balance and ride compliancy seemed better with the heavier 1.6 litre turbodiesel engine.



The 1.0 litre three-cylinder T-GDi turbo petrol engine is a bright and lively performer although much more vocal than some other units in this sector. There was a prominent growl under acceleration and some more sound deadening between the engine bay and the passenger compartment could be needed. Once cruising speeds had been reached the noise intrusion died away. It was just another point that added to the lack of refinement that most of its competitor models provide.

The 1.0 litre T-GDi engine 118 bhp turbo petrol engine provides 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm so low to medium speed acceleration response was good, taking 9.9 seconds to accelerate from zero to 60 mph. Top speed is 115 mph. With its six-speed gearbox it was easy enough to move up and down the ratios keeping the engine in its 'happy' zone'. The Combined Cycle fuel economy is 56.5 mpg and on my 70-miles test drive the real-life figure was 43.2 mpg, and that wasn't driving very fast due to the traffic and poor weather



conditions. The CO2 emissions are 115 g/km so VED road tax is £160 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate.

By comparison the 1.6 litre, four-cylinder CRDi turbodiesel unit provides 108 bhp but with significantly more torque of 260 Nm (192 lb.ft) from 1,500 rpm so it was more responsive to drive right through all speed ranges although the official figures show it is a little slower. Top speed is 112 mph and zero to 60 mph takes 10.9 seconds. However the Combined Cycle figure is 67.3 mpg and my test drive returned a much more realistic 58.8 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 109 g/km, VED road tax is £140 every year. Is it worth paying the extra £800 for the diesel engine over the best selling 1.0 litre T-GDi petrol unit? Yes it probably is with the Stonic in terms of handling, ride comfort and real-life fuel economy, but diesel power is currently not as popular as it was due as we all know.

VERDICT

Overall the Stonic is a vitally important car for Kia and their customers but in such a competitive and fast growing market sector it has to excel against the competition. Unfortunately it doesn't.

For: Key model in the fast growing Kia range, high spec, lots of colour combination and personalisation options, competitive pricing in its compact SUV class, nippy engine, slick gearchange, long warranty.

Against: Too much drab interior hard black plastic trim, limited rear seat legroom, not enough SUV exterior design differentiation between it and the Rio hatchback on which it is based.



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

Kia Stonic '2' 1.0 T-GDi, compact SUV (Best selling model).

Price: £16,995.

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol 118



bhp, 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 115 mph, 0-60 mph 9.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 56.5 mpg (43.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 115 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 22%.

Insurance Group: TBC.

Warranty: Seven years/100,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,140 mm (13.58 ft), W 1,760 mm (5.77 ft), H 1,520 mm (4.99 ft), boot/load space 352 to 1,155 litres (12.43 to 40.79 cu.ft), five doors; four/five seats.