

As some of you may be aware I recently had the offer of trying out the latest Kia Sportage from the lovely people at KIA UK. Not being one to shy away from offers such as this, i.e. I'm not particularly daft when it comes to this, I jumped at the chance.

Originally I was offered one for a two week period but that was cut to one due to 'high demand on our test fleet', which only increased my expectations of the vehicle.

The Vehicle Itself

When it arrived, bang on time I may add, I was glad that it was a colour other than White which I see around all the time. I have had a white car, a Countryman Cooper SD, and I can say from experience that I would not have another. I know it may be the new 'Black' but it is a chore to keep looking good.



My KIA on the other hand was Silver, and looked very smart with its 18" diamond cut alloys and Black Leather interior*. On my first walk around everything appeared in the correct place however I did find the boot lip rather high for access. Also the spare wheel, which was a full size alloy, could have been used more imaginatively by creating storage in the spaces around the spare. Overall however the car seemed to be well thought out and perhaps more importantly, well bolted together. It certainly had a satisfyingly solid sound when opening and shutting doors.



This particular model also came with a sunroof as well as a rear fixed glass roof which was a nice feature which made the interior feel light and airy. The interior from the drivers point of view had a very 'Germanic' feel to both its design as well as feel which obviously may have more than a little to do with the designer of ex-Audi employment. It certainly comes through in spades and more when you compare it to its stable mate from Hyundai, the IX35.

The dash and controls are pleasingly devoid of the raft of buttons found in other designs without actually missing out any of the required functionality owners and users demand from their vehicles these days. Although not fitted with SatNav, a personal choice if you ask me, I found the touch screen entertainment system was easy to master and standard processes such as pairing phones and streaming music via Bluetooth etc was managed without too much effort. A 12v socket, Aux and a USB are all there but it would have been good for the USB to be powered so that charging and music playback could be done without the need to use the 12v socket as well, just neater. Sound quality was also very good with decent default settings for the auto volume etc. This control was also passed on to the steering wheel which allowed a great deal more time of hands on wheel which was good. I do however have a gripe with a couple of the switches used on the steering wheel, the two outer 'toggle' switches'. They let the side down a little by feeling slightly flimsy and not as well built as the other switch work in the cabin. It would have made more sense to have used the more solid toggle switches that make up the other wheel controls. Steering is multi adjustable and felt good in the hand due to being wrapped in leather as is the gear selector.



Space wise the interior is quite generous, five adults can travel in relative comfort with good leg room in the rear. Storage is also a plus with plenty of drink holders as well as a cooled glove box thanks to the air con. In short I was impressed with the look and feel of the cabin and the feedback from other users, including my five year old, was that it was 'really nice'.

Driving the car



This is the 2.0i CDTi which produces in the region of 135ps. Although you may feel this is not a particularly high ps figure, it does use it very well. Progress can be made fairly swiftly through the six speed manual gear box aided by the thankfully light clutch. I had heard comment that the engines could be smoother but I did not feel this was a fair comment. It was generally quite quiet with only a marginal amount of road noise coming from the larger 18" wheels. Ride was comfortable and controlled with only a reasonable amount of body roll but 'spirited' driving on uneven surfaces did show up the limitations of the damping available, but certainly no more than others in this class.

You also have three steering weight settings, 'Comfort', 'Normal' and 'Sport'. To be honest I did not find any significant difference between the first two but the 'sport' mode certainly weighted up the steering noticeably which did not really aid the driver in terms of feel, which isn't too vague anyway, but did provide extra damping when making progress on roads that were not well maintained. Around town the adaptive steering was really light and made parking and tight manoeuvring a piece of cake. Which brings me to the rear view camera. This is a good safety feature to see if there are any obstructions to the rear but would still turn recommend you to look rearward when reversing as the screen distortion makes judgement of distance difficult.

After a few hundred miles the average mpg was around 36-38mpg. Although this car does have AWD I was hoping for a little more efficiency than that. Although I did not have an opportunity to tow anything the gearing, particularly from first to second is quite tall and should aid anyone wishing to use the Sportage for towing.

Verdict

In short I enjoyed my time with the Sportage, the interior was a nice place to be and the car very quickly felt like it would happily take anything you could throw at it with little fuss or argument. It was pleasing to drive and mixed with the frankly great 7 year warranty from KIA it should certainly be on your shopping list if you are looking for a car in this sector.