

KIA NIRO

By Jim Mc Cauley



While many manufacturers opt to expand their existing ranges by adding hybrid technologies to their existing models, Kia has decided to launch an all-new vehicle. The Niro is firmly aimed at the family market and the compact SUV or Crossover as they are now more commonly referred to, fits the bill perfectly.

Pleasantly, rather than radically designed, the Niro's appearance may be a little anonymous but will offend no tastes. Neat exterior detailing asserts the quality build of the vehicle and a no-nonsense interior has a practical Teutonic layout.

Although the new model is available with a single fixed power system, it is available in three trim levels, banded simply 1,2 and 3. A launch 'First Edition' is also on offer. The propulsion package consists of a 1.6 litre GDi petrol engine, producing 104bhp and a 43bhp electric motor with drive delivered through a 6-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox. This is supported on an all-new floorpan which is reserved for future electrified vehicles.

A working combined output of 139bhp enables the Niro to see 60mph from rest in 11.1 seconds with a potential maximum speed of 101mph. But the purpose, and joy, of hybrid technology is to stretch economy while lowering emissions, and for the Niro this is a quoted average consumption of up to 74.3mpg with a CO2 emissions of 88gms/km.

Once behind the wheel, you realise the advantages of a higher seating position and with an electric-only start off, initial progress is silent. But the surprise is the continuing quietness even when the petrol engine cuts in, and overall cabin ambience remains throughout. You get a feeling that there



remains a respect for Audi within the design department with the high tech display of the main instruments and large central infotainment screen which could come straight from a luxury saloon.



Gear changes are pleasantly smooth at normal road pace and overall ride is very much geared to the comfort of the occupants. And it is with the occupants where the Niro again scores, providing cavernous accommodation for those in the rear seat as well as an excellent boot of 421 litres, leaving you scratching your head as to where have Kia put the batteries.

For those in search of a hybrid vehicle, the Niro has to be seriously considered in terms of its overall smoothness, passenger room and luggage space. But for those who really want to focus on running costs, it is down to the road

wheel diameter and ultimately trim level. All other stats being equal, trim levels 1 and 2 come with 16-inch wheels – steel with very convincing 'alloy' covers – and offer the economy and CO2 figures quoted earlier. However, moving up to Level 3, the 18-inch wheels take the CO2 level up to 101gms/km and cut average consumption by 10mpg, to an official 64.2mpg.

And while the level of specification for Level 1 upwards is quite comprehensive, Level 2 would appear to offer all the desirables including cloth/leather upholstery, roof rails, rear privacy glass, chrome door handles, reversing sensors, electric mirrors and rain sensing wipers. On the safety front, all models come with a full suite of airbags as well as Electronic Stability Control and Vehicle Stability Management packages.

Overall, the Niro adds to Kia's engineering portfolio in a user-friendly vehicle that performs well with equally good environmental credentials. Prices start at £21,295, extending to £26,995 for the 'First Edition' model. The new hybrid went on sale in mid 2016 and like all other Kia models is covered by the company's industry leading 7-year warranty.



(Driven August 2016)