

KIA SPORTAGE FIRST EDITION

By Jim Mc Cauley

I was worried. I had just stepped down from an SUV costing almost £70,000 into one that was less than half of this. How great would the disappointment be? I shouldn't be so quick to make judgements as the new drive was in the latest Kia Sportage, and the previous model was so highly rated that it has become the Korean company's best seller.



While it has in no way abandoned the looks of the outgoing model, this fourth generation crossover is all-new and features a more assertive front end as well as detailed refinements and an overall sportier look. The new vehicle is available in a choice of four engines and three transmissions with the top of the range 'First Edition' model the subject of this report.

This has the higher output of the two diesel engines available and produces 182bhp, with drive to all four wheels via a 6-speed automatic transmission. This takes the car from 0-60mph in 9.2 seconds paring a full

2.4 seconds off the time of the lower output 2.0litre.

Fire up, and the engine is quite refined across the rev band with the 6-speed automatic well in control of the massive 400Nm of torque on offer. The six ratios are well spaced and even on take-off there is little hesitation. But get it on 'B' roads and it teases. Suspension is firm and supportive with the car retaining excellent posture through bends and you soon realise that it offers more than most of its competition.

Steering is much improved over its predecessor, and while the auto box serves well for relaxed touring, the temptation to flick to manual takes only short consideration and the pace of the vehicle can be upped to order. Torque output is normally 100% to the front wheels, but as conditions dictate, power can transfer to the rear axle to a maximum of 40% with the vehicle's Advanced Traction Control system distributing torque between the left and right wheels to maximise cornering stability. Power output is also managed by a suite of other support programs including Electronic Stability Control.

For the occupants there is a spacious and high quality cabin with excellent room for both the front and rear occupants. Dual colour upholstery and dash with highlighted stitching add a new-found ambience, but how long does it take for the driver to remember the function of around 70 switches? However, main instrumentation with digital repetition of the analogue speedometer and central 8-inch infotainment colour touch screen are clear to view and operate.

For loading, the 'First Edition' model driven has a power tailgate with separate operation from the key fob, and the very useful 491 litre boot can be extended to 1,480 litres by flipping the rear seat backs with their side mounted levers.

Overall, the fourth generation Kia Sportage has elevated both the model and the company to a higher level with its pricing representing the keenest of any of the company's ranges, bearing in mind the level of equipment that comes as standard. This includes all-wheel drive with off-road provision and hill holder function. The vehicle also comes with Autonomous Emergency Braking which uses radar to detect both vehicles and pedestrians. At speed of up to 50mph, the system detects obstacles in the car's path and will automatically slow and stop the car is necessary if the driver fails to respond to the hazard. The pedestrian detection function operates at speeds of up to 37mph.

The model is also equipped with Blind Spot Detection, Lane Keeping Assist and High Beam Assist – an automatic headlight dipping function. Other driver assist packages fitted as standard include front and rear parking sensors with a rear view camera, as well as Smart Park Assist which identifies and automatically steers the vehicle into or out of an appropriate parking space.

In terms of its economy and environmental credentials, the new Sportage 'First Edition' has



an official combined fuel consumption of 44.8mpg and a CO2 emissions of 166gms/km which puts it in Band H for annual car tax of £295. With regards to the official mpg, I returned 34.1mpg over a week's driving which represents a very respectable 76% of the official laboratory figure.



The 'First Edition' is available in metallic black or white with (I hope!) optional 'First Edition' decals along the door bottoms. The one-off special edition is priced at £31,495 in a range that opens at £17,995. For this you get a vehicle not far removed from the

one I slipped out of costing over twice that amount. Like all Kia vehicles, the new Sportage is backed by the company's industry leading 7-year warranty.

(Driven April 2016)