

Kia Picanto

Road Test

By Jim Mc Cauley

With the majority of manufacturers playing extremely safe by slowly evolving their model ranges, it is refreshing to see a completely new star on the horizon. Introduced in 2004, Kia's baby has been the mainstay seller for the company and now the new Picanto looks set to maintain the tradition.

Gone are the passive looks of the original model line which are replaced by the strong-jaw styling of the new arrival. Available initially only in 5-door bodystyle, the assertive angular lines of the latest edition give it immense presence and character.



Despite adding just 60mm to overall length and retaining the same width and height of its predecessor the overall effect makes the car look much larger. Underneath is a choice of two economical engines which offer significant performance advantages over their predecessors. The smaller engine is a 3-cylinder, 1.0 litre unit producing 68 bhp while the larger 1.25 litre engine has 4-cylinders and produces 84 bhp. Both drive through 5-speed manual gearboxes respectively covering the 0-60 mph sprint in 13.9 and 11.0 seconds. On road, the cars perform well, the 1.25 litre engine maintaining better pace in top compared to the 1.0 litre which

requires generous use of 4th gear to maintain fluid pace.

Both cars have excellent chassis set-up offering confident support which enables the engines to be taken beyond the expectations of most of the buyers in this sector. Eerily quiet at tickover, both engines sound good as they extend into their rev range with the larger engine offering the performance advantage while the steering response is preferable on the smaller (and lighter) engined version.

In keeping with the exterior, interior layout carries through the key styling elements and is a modern, welcoming environment with improved provision in the Grade 2 and Grade 3 trims. While all models from Grade 1 upwards have tilt adjustable steering, height adjustment on the driver's seat, electric front windows and radio /CD unit, Grade 2 adds Bluetooth with voice activation and recognition, manual air conditioning, electric mirror adjustment, USB connection and steering-wheel mounted audio controls.

Grade 3 adds daytime running lights and automatic headlights with LED projection lamps.



However, despite the Grade level, safety provision remains constant across the range with six airbags, and front seatbelt pre-tensioners with load limiters on all models along with Electronic Stability Control (ESC) and Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EDB). In addition, the 1.25 litre model is available with the company's start / stop technology, badged 'Eco Dynamics'.

Passenger accommodation is stretched to the max at the expense of the luggage area where its 200 litres will cater for the basics – approximately two cabin approved flight cases. A puncture repair system is carried rather than a spare wheel.

Overall, the new Picanto from Kia comfortably cements the company's grip on the small car market with a model that offers personality, quality and economy with average fuel consumption on the combined cycle ranging from 60.1 mpg for the 1.25 litre to 67.3 for the smaller engine. With a CO2 emissions of 109 gms/km, the 1.25 litre model is in Band B for annual car tax of £20, while the 1.0 litre model with 99 gms/km emissions is in Band A, and therefore tax free.

The new Picanto went on sale in June 2011 with prices starting at £7,995 and the unique benefit of Kia's 7-year comprehensive warranty. In addition the base model was available from September with air conditioning at a £600 premium and a 3-door version completes the range.