

Kia Rio 1.4

By Jim Mc Cauley

In an industry now dominated by ultra-safe but boring evolutions, it is refreshing to experience the confidence and originality of Kia, driven by their Head of Design, Peter Schreyer.

The product range has been through a revolution not just in engineering and warranty terms, but also most notably in their styling. Place the new Rio alongside its predecessor and you see two designs that are quite literally continents apart.



Kia's European design base and the man whose CV need only contain the words Audi TT have catapulted the Korean company into mainstream 21st Century automotive desirables, and the new Rio is one of its shop window attractions. For all manufacturers a competitor in the B segment is the all-important volume seller where the competition includes the likes of the Ford Fiesta and Volkswagen Polo. Complete the list and you end up with over 50 models vying for a new home where 75 per cent of the owners opt for petrol power.

This prompted the choice of test vehicle with the larger engined 1.4 litre version being the model selected. This unit produces 107 bhp at 5300 rpm with 137 Nm of torque available at 4200 rpm. At tick-over the engine is extremely quiet and it retains its refinement across the rev band. Driving through a 6-speed manual gearbox, top gear is surprisingly flexible and can comfortably accelerate the car at normal road speeds without the need to change down. Although you are aware that the steering is electrically assisted at lower manoeuvring speeds because of the way it steps through its positioning, it reacts very smoothly on the open road providing good feel and accurate turn-in.

Suspension is well dampened to give a supportive ride while snug bucket seats provide a comforting grip for the front seat occupants. Rear seat provision offers excellent access and very good room for three adults, while a 288 litre boot is more than enough space for a car in this class.

Around the cabin there are plenty of useful storage compartments including a central armrest / bin and pockets with bottle holders in the rear doors. Grab handles are also provided but cabin lighting is solely from a centrally mounted unit with no forward reading lights for driver or passenger.

Trim level of the test car was mid range





level '2' which is distinguished externally by the 16-inch alloy wheels, front fog lights and a chrome grille surround. Inside this model comes with premium cloth upholstery, all-round electric windows and a cooling glovebox. This is in addition to the standard specification across the range of six airbags, self-locking doors on

moving off, Electronic Stability Program, and Emergency Brake Assist. All models also come with Hill Start Assist that prevents the car from rolling back on steep take-offs.

On the economy and emission fronts, the 1.4 litre model returns an official fuel consumption figure of 51.4 mpg in mixed driving while a CO2 emissions figure of 128 gms/km puts it in Band D for annual car tax of £95. The model is listed at £13,095 and comes with Kia's industry leading 7-year / 100,000 mile warranty.