

HERE 4 MOTORING

First Drive: All New Kia Sorento

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If you want a family car with seven seats then look no further than the all-new Kia Sorento.

Once known for being a budget brand, Kia has gone way beyond that and is competing with premium vehicles. That's not spin – it's fact. Just get behind the wheel of the Sorento and the vehicle speaks for itself.



The third-generation model is better equipped, more refined, stylish and technologically advanced than before. It's longer, lower and wider too, thanks to a revolutionised platform, while an extended wheelbase creates greater room in all three rows of seats.

You'll probably only be looking at this car if you have kids, so, as a father-of-three, I know safety will be at the forefront of your mind. Well, rest easy, because the Sorento has been awarded with a five-star Euro NCAP safety rating. Safety technologies include Advanced Smart Cruise Control, Blind Spot Detection, Rear Cross Traffic Alert, Lane Departure Warning System, Around View Monitoring and Speed Limit Information. In the UK, the new Sorento range comprises six models at launch. All are powered by a 2.2-litre turbodiesel engine, with either a six-speed manual or automatic gearbox. All have permanent, intelligent all-wheel drive and trim levels are KX-1, KX-2, KX-3 and KX-4.

I drove the mid range KX-2 and higher range KX-3 around the beautiful roads of Marbella in Spain. Both test cars came with the smooth-changing manual gearbox – and, to be honest, it was hard to tell the trim levels apart. That's good though, because it shows how well Kia has started to deck out its motors. The Sorento has soft-touch surfaces throughout the cabin; however the elephant-hide-look dash material is overdone. That said; the seats come in black leather, creating a classy appearance. The standard instrument cluster features clear white-on-black graphics which deliver all essential information at a glance, but in the KX-3 version this is replaced by a seven-inch TFT (Thin Film Transistor) display which adds an even more premium look to the dashboard, and allows

greater personalisation of the information provided.

Legroom has been increased in all three rows of seating. The second-row seats slide forward, giving much-improved access to the two seats in the rear, which now offer enough space to accommodate adults. Even better, the transmission tunnel has been completely eliminated, resulting in a completely flat floor for your passengers' feet. The boot is longer than before too, and loading up is a doddle because of the Sorento's low, easy access sill.



On the move, the 197bhp engine has fistfuls of pull, with outstanding driveability on- and off-road. It's a quiet and sophisticated oil-burner with 0-62mph taking just nine seconds with the manual 'box. All versions have a more than respectable top speed of 124mph. Importantly for a family car, the new Sorento has lower fuel consumption and emissions than before. The manual models I drove can achieve up to 46.3mpg on average with CO2 emissions of 161g/km.

In conclusion, minutely detailed body, cabin and chassis engineering work has resulted in a large SUV which is not only more engaging to drive, but also more refined to travel in. And with a seven-year or 100,000-mile warranty, the Sorento will deliver peace of mind, which is priceless when it comes to family motoring.

PROS 'N' CONS

Spacious ✓

Quiet ✓

Practical ✓

'Elephant skin' cabin materials X

FAST FACTS

Max speed: 124 mph

0-62 mph: 9.0 secs

Combined mpg: 46.3

Engine: 2199cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbodiesel

Max. power (bhp): 197

Max. torque (lb.ft): 325

CO2: 161 g/km

Price: £31,995 (KX-2) £35,845 (KX-3)