



Game on

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FINALLY, KIA HAS ADDED AN estate to its flagship Optima range. The Sportswagon version is just one of many new cars the South Korean car-maker

has introduced recently. The latest incarnation of the Sportage SUV went on sale in February, and the all-new Niro hybrid followed in the summer. And a plug-in hybrid model has also joined the Optima line-up—though only as a saloon.

The estate should give Optima some more traction as a private hire vehicle, and it's the first estate of this size that Kia has ever offered. It goes up against strong opponents such as Vauxhall's Insignia Sports Tourer and Ford's Mondeo estate, plus the market-leading Skoda Superb—and it's just as good looking as any of its rivals. It's long and sleek, with roof bars, shiny alloys and an especially handsome outline, ending with a fetching spoiler on the tailgate.

The Kia Optima Sportswagon will seat five adults and we found getting into the rear seats easy; even occupants who are well over six-foot-tall are well catered for. Legroom is good—and headroom is

excellent due to the Sportswagon's relatively elevated roofline. All passengers will be comfortable, with only a long-of-leg middle rear seat passenger feeling a little cramped.

The Kia is 4,855mm long, 1,860mm wide and 1,470mm tall. By comparison, the Ford Mondeo is longer at 4,867mm, but a fraction narrower and a shade taller at 1,501mm. The Vauxhall Insignia Sports Tourer is also longer at 4,913mm, but a little smaller than the Optima in width at 1,856 mm, and taller still at 1,520mm. Perhaps surprisingly, the Superb Estate is only a single millimetre longer than the Optima, though it's wider and taller.

The Kia Sportswagon has a load space of 552 litres, which swells to 1,686 litres with the rear seats folded. It can't match the Superb's capacious 625 litres (1,950 with the seats down), but it is significantly larger than the Mondeo's 500 litres (1,605 litres). It's also more voluminous when it comes to loading up than the Insignia Sports Tourer's 540/1,530 litres.

The Kia's luggage area is also low, flat and wide, making the loading of luggage a cinch. There are some useful oddment nets and a fake boot floor that can be lifted to make extra room, too. This makes the

Kia Optima Sportswagon one very practical estate car.

The fascia of the new Kia is straightforward and neat, with a satnav incorporated into a large, clear, colour touchscreen. This is sensibly placed in the centre of the Optima Sportswagon's pleasing-to-the-touch dashboard.

Quality is notable elsewhere, too, with soft-touch plastics where you want them most. The plastics only get cheaper at the base of the dash and around the bottoms of the seats—but they're hardly noticeable. Tech doesn't just stop at the satnav or touchscreen, the Kia also gets Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, which enables you to use your smartphone without taking your hands away from the steering wheel.

Furthermore, it's possible to charge mobile devices using a wireless charger located at the bottom of the central console. You also get parking sensors and a reversing camera, an electrically-alterable driver's seat, heated front seats, a lane-keep assist system, climate control and a high spec Harman Kardon audio system. In addition, privacy glass and a luggage rail system is included.

Behind the wheel, things are very comfortable.

Kia Optima
Sportswagon 3 1.7 CRDi

first
drive

first drive

The pedals aren't offset, instantly making the driving position a pleasing one. The clutch is light and the gearshifts slick—although the manual six-speed gearbox has quite a long throw. The steering wheel is thick and pleasant to grip, lending further to driver contentment.

The Kia Sportswagon still uses Kia's 1.7-litre diesel, but upgraded to 139bhp from the original Optima. It has lots of low-down shove for when overtaking is necessary, and the ride is smooth. The steering is precise, too, albeit slightly artificial in feel. This doesn't stop the car being entertainingly quick to respond in corners, though—even if body roll does kick in when driving enthusiastically.

The cabin is a quiet place to be, even at speed. Diesel engine noise is all but muted, with hardly any vibration coming into the car either. What's more, the Kia's suspension copes with lumps in the tarmac well, without banging around and unsettling passengers.

The Kia Optima Sportswagon has a top five-star score from Euro NCAP, so safety kit is top notch. Equipment includes blind spot detection and autonomous emergency braking. The Kia also features automatic cruise control, where radar is used to slow the Optima's progress in heavy traffic. The Kia Optima Sportswagon is only available in Britain with a 1.7-litre diesel power unit, but it's punchy enough, with 0-60mph arriving in 9.8 seconds on its way to 124mph.

Obviously, fuel efficiency is an important factor for this car segment—and the Optima Sportswagon, as tested here in high spec '3' trim with the manual transmission doesn't disappoint. 64.2mpg is achievable on average and CO₂ emissions are 113g/km. A dual-clutch automatic gearbox is available on the Kia as well—and this claims a return of 61.4mpg and emissions of 120g/km of CO₂. It's more lethargic, though—with a 0-60mph time of 10.7 seconds. The top speed remains the same.

FACTFILE

PRICE	£24,495
ENGINE	1.685cc four-cylinder 16 valve, turbodiesel
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual, front-wheel drive
POWER	139bhp @ 4,000rpm
TORQUE	340Nm @ 1,750-2,500rpm
0-62MPH	10.0sec
TOP SPEED	124mph
COMBINED FUEL ECONOMY	64.2mpg
CO ₂ EMISSIONS	113g/km
LENGTH	4,855mm
WHEELBASE	2,805mm
WIDTH	1,860mm
HEIGHT	1,470mm
LOADSPACE	552 litres
FUEL TANK CAPACITY	70 litres
WARRANTY	7 years/100,000 miles
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VERDICT



The Kia Optima Sportswagon is a handsome, comfy, practical, efficient and pithy performer. In '3' trim, you get lots of standard kit for the car's £24,495 price-tag.

It's a tad cheaper than a Ford Mondeo Zetec 2.0 Duratorq TDCi 150PS (£24,995) and a bit more expensive than a Vauxhall Insignia Design Nav 1.6CDTi 136PS (£22,174).

It's therefore a worthy, slightly unorthodox, alternative to both—and definitely worth test driving if you're looking for a practical large estate car. Ideal for those operators looking to do airport runs with a car that feels comfortable on motorways, even fully loaded.