

Move-in ready.

The Kia Sorento makes us feel right at home.

By Joe Sage



We drove the Kia Sorento—also a four-cylinder EX FWD—fourteen months ago (see our May/June 2011 issue) and got right to the point. “Straightforward flat-out great deal,” read the headline. “How many new ways can we say ‘bang for the buck?’” We have indeed developed a tendency to look at any number of competitive offerings—and with that, we include ones at two or three times the cost—in terms of comparison to this attractively-priced Kia. How does it strike us a year or so later?

Last year’s tester was a 2011 model, and this year’s—as we ease into the second half of the year—is a 2012. (You can now shop for a 2013.) The vehicle is in its second generation, out since early 2010 as a 2011 model, built in the US, featuring unibody rather than truck-frame construction, and immediately recognizable by its aggressive, modern “tiger nose” grille and headlights.

The Sorento will be much the same for 2013, although base trim level inclusions expand a bit and option packages are adjusted accordingly. For example, this 2.4L EX FWD—2.4L being the smaller engine, EX being midlevel trim and FWD being front-wheel drive, while all-wheel drive is also available—goes up \$1000 in base price, but some of the 2012 Premium Package elements are included, reducing a comparable package by \$600 for 2013.

If we were shopping, we traditionally would almost surely opt for all-wheel drive, which in the 4-cylinder EX adds just \$1700 for all that capability. However, that drops highway fuel mileage ratings surprisingly—from 22/32 city/highway for the front-driver to 21/27 for the all-wheel-driver. This makes the decision harder and more purpose-driven. Similar logic nudges us away from a preference for the bigger engine, to stick with the 2.4L four (saving only \$1000), to keep that 22/32 MPG estimate, versus 20/26 for the V6. In other words, this exact vehicle we have tested saved \$2700 on purchase day, and saves on gas all year long. But the gap closes if we ignore highway and compare combined mileage estimates, at 25 vs 23 MPG for the above. We find the Premium Package a sure bet, more than worth it for the Infinity sound system alone, which competes in quality with free-standing systems others sell for three times this total package price (and we value the rest of the package, too).

The Kia Sorento is a headache-free, point-and-shoot vehicle to drive. Getting on the freeway for the first time, on a busy metered ramp, we didn’t have to think twice: the 4-cylinder Sorento had the power to beat half the others up the ramp easily. We can reaffirm last year’s note that the Kia is “pretty peppy, could be a little more-so, handles great (with) flat tracking, no wallowing.”

It’s a rare vehicle anymore that doesn’t need some fully-parked time with the manual, to master at least some of the intricacies of its controls. On the Sorento, we noted we were able to adjust the audio system, climate control and other key options intuitively with a minimum of thinking or looking. That rates high.

The styling and design of the Kia Sorento are clean and pleasing, inside and out. The vehicle drives well, shifts well, has great capacity, more than decent fuel mileage across the range, value pricing with lots of options yet an easy pricing pattern to comprehend, and Kia’s stellar warranty and build quality to back it up.

We were a little disappointed to see ours topping \$30,000, even if only after the destination charge, but as



you can see (sidebar), it is very easy to come in well below that. (There are also ways to come in a few grand above, although even an SX AWD with the V6 and absolutely every possible option still tops out at just \$36,100.) We had one Andy Rooney moment with the operator interface: if you restart the vehicle and the radio was on before, the radio is on again. If you put it in reverse, then realize you want to turn the radio off, you can’t. You have to turn the camera operation off, by taking it out of reverse, just to silence the radio (a great idea while backing up). It’s a separate button for audio, not part of the touchscreen, so it seems flat-out unnecessary. We usually find a dozen or two such ironic annoyances, though, and this was our only one on the Sorento.

We had the Sorento for a very busy week, including a couple of days built around the Copperstate 1000. Although we did get some highway miles in, en route to elements of that event, mostly we used the Sorento exactly as most users would: running to the cleaners, picking up office supplies, loading in the family and running to the market. As we emptied out the results of one of these runs, we realized that we felt as though we had already moved into the vehicle. Given that week’s crazy schedule, we probably only really used the Sorento about half the time, so that is all the more an impressive sign.

The Kia Sorento has been a Kelly Blue Book “Top 10 Family Car” of 2011 and 2012, and Consumer Reports rated it their Top Pick Family SUV last year. Would we buy a Kia Sorento? Our week with the vehicle leaves us feeling as though we happily already did. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....2.4L 16v DOHC CVT 4-cylinder
Horsepower/Torque	.....175 hp / 169 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	..6-speed auto w/Sportmatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....Front-wheel drive
BASE PRICE	.....*\$25,950
OPTIONS: Premium Package I:	Leather seat trim (first two rows), heated front seats, auto-dim mirror/Homelink, power fold side mirrors, memory driver’s seat and mirror, power passenger seat, navigation w/ Sirius Traffic, Infinity Surround Sound audio and 50/50 split folding third row seat.....*\$3800
Cargo Net	.....\$50
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....\$800
TOTAL PRICE	.....*\$30,600
***[For 2013, base is \$26,950, a comparable package is \$3200, and the total is \$31,000]	

2013 MODELS AND PRICING:

Kia Sorento LX 2.4L I-4 FWD	.....\$23,150
Kia Sorento LX 2.4L I-4 AWD	.....\$25,350
Kia Sorento LX 3.5L V6 FWD	.....\$25,700
Kia Sorento LX 3.5L V6 AWD	.....\$27,400
Kia Sorento EX 2.4L I-4 FWD	.....\$26,950
Kia Sorento EX 2.4L I-4 AWD	.....\$28,650
Kia Sorento EX 3.5L V6 FWD	.....\$27,950
Kia Sorento EX 3.5L V6 AWD	.....\$29,650
Kia Sorento SX 3.5L V6 FWD	.....\$31,700
Kia Sorento SX 3.5L V6 AWD	.....\$33,400