

UTILITY

[and other characteristics]

BY DEGREE

By Barbara & Bill Schaffer and Joe Sage



Kia Rondo

It seems like we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to categorize some of the latest auto manufacturer offerings. Our most recent labeling exercise was for the Rondo, which Kia officials labeled a crossover and we agree. (We've also heard it called a small minivan, wagon and five-door hatchback.)

It doesn't matter what it's called, the Kia Rondo is an excellent example of the passion and pride Kia is building into its vehicles. Rondo heritage dates back through two generations of the European Caren; the European design influence is obvious in the smooth exterior lines, high stance, sloped "D" pillar and wagon styling.

The seats in both the five- and seven-passenger versions are split (60/40 in the second row and 50/50 in the third row) to allow the owner to easily tailor the cargo capacity and shape to various flat surfaces. The third row is more for an occasional adult or smaller children. We were amazed at the roomy interior, wide door openings, headroom and legroom (especially in the first two rows). The inside has an abundance of convenient storage compartments and drink holders.

Cargo space is limited to 6.5 cubic feet when all three rows are in place, but there is a compartment in the cargo area for the jack and tools. If those items are removed, the compartment, which appears to have a drain hole, could be used to ice a few beverages. With the third row flat, there is 31.7 cubic feet of

cargo space.

Rondo comes in two trim levels and with two front-wheel-drive engine choices. A 2.4-liter four-cylinder (167hp SULEV or 175hp ULEV) provides a comfortable level of performance to both the LX and EX models through a four-speed automatic transmission. An optional 2.7-liter V-6 engine (192hp) with five-speed automatic transmission is available in both models.

Pricing starts at \$17,495 for the base four-cylinder LX and goes to \$22,295 for the V-6 EX with 5-speed automatic (plus \$650 destination charge). Leather, convenience and premium packages add \$4,000.

The Kia planners have taken no shortcuts on this car. The Rondo uses quality materials in a well-designed and -executed application to create the feeling of a much more substantial vehicle than we would normally expect at this price point.

On the road, the Rondo is exceptionally quiet and solid with little road noise. The ride is smooth and controlled with the feeling of a larger vehicle. Both engines provide spirited performance with respectable acceleration and passing power. The extra horsepower of the V-6 makes a notable difference in power, with only a small fuel economy penalty. The four-cylinder engine gets a 20/27 mpg EPA fuel economy rating, while the V-6 gets an 18/26 mpg rating.

As the twelfth vehicle in the Kia North American portfolio, the Rondo has not only attracted the attention of a

growing number of satisfied buyers, but has caught the attention of other automakers, foreign and domestic.

Kia Sportage

The second-generation 2009 Sportage offers design and technological advancements, and fuel economy has improved. It builds off the award-winning 2008 model, named *Cars.com's* "Best Bang for the Buck."

With its new face lift, Sportage's exterior represents Kia's newest design direction, with new grille, headlamps and fog lights, plus rear bumpers that match body color. Exterior styling includes multi-reflector headlamps, roof rails, front and rear towing hooks and a front-end skid plate, standard on all LX models. In addition to receiving the V6 engine with automatic transmission, upgrading to the EX model includes a power-operated, one-touch sunroof, fog lights and heated outside mirrors.

Opting for a Sport Package, available on LX V6 models, adds distinctive features including fog lights, leather steering wheel and shift knob, rear spoiler, rear cargo cover and the brand-new 17-inch alloy wheels.

Sportage options include two engine alternatives, a five-speed manual or four-speed Sportmatic™ transmission, and either two-wheel or full-time four-wheel drive. The 2.0-liter, 16-valve inline-4 engine uses Continuously Variable Valve Timing (CVT) to boost performance, enhance fuel economy and reduce emissions at low- and mid-range rpm. The engine generates 140 horse-

power at 6,000 rpm and 136 pound-feet of torque at 4,500 rpm, giving Sportage competitive power for its class. A more powerful V6 engine is available for LX, standard for EX models, and is mated to a four-speed Sportmatic transmission. The lightweight and compact DOHC 24-valve, all-aluminum 2.7-liter engine generates 173 horsepower at 6,000 rpm and 178 pound-feet of torque at 4,000 rpm. Fully independent suspension in the front and rear deliver responsive on-road handling and comfort on a variety of road surfaces, while retaining long wheel travel and true off-road ability.

Sportage comes equipped with standard SIRIUS Satellite Radio capabilities, auxiliary and USB jacks with MP3 playback capabilities, and iPod integration available with an optional cable. An optional navigational system is also new for Sportage this year.

Sportage boasts a roomy ride for up to five adults and a wide variety of cargo. The innovative "Drop & Fold" rear seat has a 60/40-split cushion and backrest that allows the bottom cushion to move forward and down into the rear footwell area, and the seat backrest to be folded completely flat and onto the same level as the trunk floor. This easy operation can be executed without removing the rear head restraints. With all seats occupied, Sportage can carry three sets of golf clubs in the load area; the maximum cargo volume is 66.6 cubic feet when the rear seats are folded flat.

Sportage storage inside includes a large center con-

sole, large lockable glove box, overhead sunglasses holder, map and cup holders in all four doors and rear seat central armrest with cup holders.

Sportage earned a five-star crash safety rating in frontal and side impact crash tests from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 2007 and 2008. Standard safety features include six standard airbags (two advanced front airbags, two front-seat-mounted side airbags, and two full-length side-curtain airbags); traction control system (TCS); electronic stability control (ESC); and four-wheel disc brakes with a four-channel, four-sensor antilock brake system (ABS).

Rondo or Sportage

Basically, if you want four-wheel drive, and/or if you need towing capability, you're looking at the Sportage. If you want to carry seven passengers, you're looking at the Rondo. Only the Sportage offers a manual transmission. The Rondo has noticeably more engine power. If you don't have any of those specific needs, either one will likely work out quite well. Purchase price and fuel economy ratings are very similar for both, through their respective model and powertrain ranges. The sidebar at right gives a comparison of the fundamentals of the two (for the most current information, visit your dealer or www.kia.com). For us, the Sportage had a little more of the we'd-keep-this-indefinitely feel. Your best plan is to head to the dealer and drive them both. ■

SPECS: RONDO VS. SPORTAGE

Visit your dealer or www.kia.com for the latest info.

BODY: RONDOFive-door CUV
Drive wheelsfront
Passenger capacity5-7

BODY: SPORTAGECompact SUV
Drive wheels4x2 (front) or 4x4
Passenger capacity5

ENGINES: RONDO2.4L I42.7L V6
HorsepowerULEV: 175192
.....SULEV: 167
Fuel tank capacity (gal.)15.915.9

ENGINES: SPORTAGE2.0L I42.7L V6
Horsepower140173
Fuel tank capacity (gal.)15.317.2

MSRP: 2009 RONDO

Rondo LX
2.4L I4, 4-spd automatic (base)\$17,495
2.4L I4, 4-spd automatic\$18,495
2.7L V6, 5-spd automatic\$19,495
Rondo EX
2.4L I4, 4-spd automatic\$21,295
2.7L V6, 5-spd automatic\$22,295
Destination charge\$650

MSRP: 2009 SPORTAGE

Sportage LX
2.0 I4, 5-spd manual (4x2) (no A/C)\$16,695
2.0 I4, 5-spd manual (4x4)\$20,195
2.0 I4, 4-spd automatic (4x2)\$19,695
2.7 V6, 4-spd automatic (4x2)\$20,695
2.7 V6, 4-spd automatic (4x4)\$21,995
Sportage EX
2.7 V6, 4-spd automatic (4x2)\$21,900
2.7 V6, 4-spd automatic (4x4)\$23,400
Destination charge\$675

DIMENSIONS.....Rondo ...Sportage

Overall length179.0171.3
Overall width71.770.9
Overall height (/roof rack)65.0(/66.9)66.7
Wheelbase106.3103.5
Track (front/rear)62.0/61.860.6/60.6
Ground clearance6.17.7
Approach angle29.5°
Departure angle28.7°

TIRES & WHEELS

Rondo.....LX tiresP205/60HR16
.....EX tiresP225/50R17
.....Wheels6.5J x 16 steel
.....(optional) 6.5J x 16 alloy
Sportage.....I4 tiresP215/65R16
.....V6 tiresP235/60R16
.....Wheels6.5J x 16, alloy

SPORTAGE TOWING...*wo.....*w...GVWR

2.0L I4 : 4x2100015004519
2.0L I4 : 4x4100015004674
2.7L V6 : 4x2100020004630
2.7L V6 : 4x4100020004850
*wo= without trailer brakes, w= with trailer brakes

FUEL ECONOMY (city/hwy mpg)

Rondo.....2.4L I4 (A/T)20/27
.....2.7L V6 (A/T)18/26
Sportage.....2.0L I4 : 4x2 (M/T)20/25
.....2.0L I4 : 4x2 (A/T)20/25
.....2.0L I4 : 4x4 (M/T)19/24
.....2.7L V6 : 4x2 (A/T)18/23
.....2.7L V6 : 4x4 (A/T)18/23