

Peppy!



By Barbara & Bill Schaffer

For years auto manufacturers have introduced new vehicles targeted at the latest influential youth group. This makes a lot of sense because hitting that target with the right product could cause an avalanche of sales for the new car if it's deemed to be cool. The ultimate goal is to get younger buyers into the brand and develop a loyalty so that the next time they need a new car they will buy the next step up, based on their changing lifestyle, in that brand.

At the media introduction of the Soul in Miami, Kia made a strong pitch for the appeal of the Soul to Generation Y, but we think that is short sighted. The Soul has an appeal far beyond those born in the 1980s and 1990s. When we cruised through Miami Beach in the Kia Soul at that time, we hardly saw a head turn to check it out. However, elsewhere, later, we saw lots of heads turning and we answered all kinds of questions about the Soul in parking lots. We're not sure whether it was the Molten Red color on our test car at home, or that the people in Miami are jaded by unique car designs, as they may be in Arizona. Or maybe Miami has the wrong age group.

As boomers, we think the Soul is cool. Tagged as "a new way to roll," the Kia Soul is an "urban passenger vehicle" designed for an active lifestyle. Foremost in the Soul

Directly on the heels of earning a "Top Safety Pick" by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), the new Kia Soul has been named to the "Top 10 Back-to-School Cars" list by *Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com*, recognized for fun and quirky styling, impressive interior space, extensive warranty, notable fuel economy and creature comforts.

mission is the ability to personalize the vehicle, as Gen Y'ers like to do.

What really sets the Soul apart from the crowd is the unique exterior design. At 161.6 inches long, the Soul is about the same size as a Volkswagen New Beetle. With the beltline running up toward the rear, and the roofline running down toward the rear it looks as if the Soul is wearing a large pair of stylish wraparound sunglasses. Fascia flaring extends from the front down the sides creating pronounced wheel arches, then ties in with a tailored rear end, with its prominent hatchback. The wide stance is accentuated in the "!" and Sport models by 18-inch wheels and wide tires.

Magically, the small exterior footprint is filled with an amazing amount of interior space for five passengers on comfortable and colorful seats. Cargo space behind the rear seat is a generous 19.3 cubic feet. Fold the seatbacks down and the cargo area grows to 53.4 cubic feet. Designers have created 14 additional storage zones, including spaces like a



double level glove box with enough room for a medium size laptop computer. Under the rear cargo space is another larger area for hiding valuables.

The Soul comes in four trim levels: Base, "+", "!" and Sport. Pricing ranges from \$13,995, including destination charge for the Base up to \$17,645 for either the "!" or the "sport" all with a five-speed manual transmission. A four-speed automatic is available on the three upper level models for \$950. With only one option, a sunroof, the Sport tops out at \$19,295.

A 122-hp 1.6-liter DOHC four-cylinder engine powers the base model, with all other models getting a 142-hp, 2.0-liter DOHC four-cylinder. We drove the 2.0-liter version with both transmissions and were pleased with the freeway performance, but thought the manual transmission was more fun to drive.



Riding on a rigid all-new platform, Soul has MacPherson struts, coil springs and stabilizer bar in the front and a transverse torsion beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs in the rear. We weren't able to get much of a feel for the Soul's handling capabilities on the mostly straight roads around Miami, but the ride was smooth and controlled even on rough surfaces. We are looking forward to spending more time in Soul on our home turf.

We thought the fit and finish, material quality and general design of the Soul was first rate, plus the 10-year/100,000-mile limited powertrain warranty, five-year/60,000-mile limited basic warranty and a five-year/100,000-mile anti-perforation warranty make it a great value.

The Kia Soul may be right on target for the Gen Y crowd, but we think it's a winner for any age group. ■

THE OBVIOUS COMPARISONS



	Soul	xB	Cube
Engine	122-142 hp	158 hp	122 hp
EPA	24/30 mpg	22/28 mpg	30 mpg
Length	161.6"	167.3"	156.7"
Wheelbase	100.4"	102.4"	99.6"
Width	70.3"	69.3"	66.7"
Height	63.4"	64.7"	65.0"
Price	\$13,995	\$15,750	\$13,990
	to \$17,645	to \$18,343	to \$19,370

KIA SOUL FOCUS GROUP

By Joe Sage

To make sure the new Kia Soul is indeed cool, we enlisted the opinions of Michael Levy, a high school student eagerly awaiting his permit, who is also a guitarist and drummer, regularly toting equipment to gigs and practice with his compadres, as we used to do at the same age. The combination of good looks, utility and decent performance offered by the Soul should be right up his alley. We blindsided him with a first look at the car.

"I think it's like the Scion xB," Michael noted. "I call it a box car, the xB, but this is more rounded off. I definitely like this better. More rounded is cooler." He was thinking of the older xB and hadn't seen the new one yet, but it was a thumbs-up for exterior styling.

"The red and black seats are cool." We discussed loading both rock gear and people inside, and Michael noted, "If you're not bringing a bunch of people, you'd be fine." We figured you could have drums and one guitar in back and two musicians in the front, with the seats down. So a band would want two of them. Thumbs-up inside.

So, would it be cool? "Yeah, as long as it's affordable for someone who has a teen's job." We told him the Soul starts at \$13-something and that our top-of-the-line Soul Sport test vehicle was still just \$17-something. Michael liked that. "Oh, that's not bad... 'cause if you

got a long loan, then you could have small payments..." So you'd be paying for it when you turn 30?, we asked. Michael laughs and says, "Yeah... but it's not bad." Thumbs-up on price.

So just how cool is it, overall? We asked where it might fall on a 1-to-10 scale. "Well that's hard to do," answered Michael, with a glance across the parking lot, "because you can compare it with things like that Mercedes S-Class... but I'd say... 7 or 8."

"But," he added, getting to the important stuff, "does it come with a good radio? 'cause that's really important for kids my age. A lot of my friends buy a car, then they've gotta go out and put in a thousand-dollar stereo, so how is it?"

We'll find out. We had mixed the controls a bit, already, but Michael adjusted it more, backing off the treble for the sake of bass. So is it good enough not to need a custom? Or would you still do that if you could? "I think I'd keep it as is," he replied. Thumbs-up on the all-important audio.

Michael sums up the market in general and the Kia Soul in particular, as follows: "You have somebody who can make something small and in a cool shape and for a good price with a bunch of cool lights inside and a lot of cool dumb stuff, and a good radio, that would be really good... and there it is." Thumbs up, all around. ■