

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 6
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010

ASIA RISING

ECONOMY, QUALITY, PERFORMANCE, LUXURY
OR INCREASINGLY ALL OF THE ABOVE: WE DRIVE ON
WEST COAST AND DESERT VEHICLE LAUNCHES
IN LOCALES FROM SAN DIEGO TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

ALL-NEW 2011 KIA OPTIMA

Newport Coast to Temecula, Southern California

2011 INFINITI LINEUP

Napa Wine Country, Northern California

ALL-NEW 2011 SCION tC

Las Vegas and Red Rock Park, Nevada

ALL-NEW 2011 NISSAN JUKE

Sunshine Coast of British Columbia

2010 TOYOTA SEQUOIA

Freeways and trails of metro Phoenix



MOTORSPORTS: LYN ST. JAMES - BRYAN SPERBER - PIR 2011 NASCAR SCHEDULE - LUCAS OIL OFF ROAD RACING SCHEDULE

AUCTIONS: BARRETT-JACKSON LAS VEGAS - AUCTIONS AMERICA BY RM AUBURN - ARIZONA JANUARY AUCTION DETAILS

EVENTS & ATTRACTIONS: RED BULL FLUGTAG LONG BEACH - ARIZONA INTERNATIONAL AUTO SHOW - GOODGUYS 2011 SCHEDULE

TRAVEL & ATTRACTIONS: TUCSON HIGHLIGHTS - SEDONA FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS - LA COUNTY HISTORY MUSEUM

ARIZONA RIDER: ZERO MOTORCYCLES ELECTRIC BIKE LINEUP • **ARIZONA FLYER:** TERRAFUGIA TRANSITION "FLYING CAR"

ARIZONA BOATER: MERCEDES-BENZ SLS AMG CIGARETTE RACING 46' RIDER - WALLYPOWER 55M MEGA YACHT.....AND MORE

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • SAFETY • PERFORMANCE • MAINTENANCE • MOTORSPORTS • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



ACCORD, CAMRY AND FUSION:
MEET THE NEW COMPETITION

Kia has had tremendous growth during its 16 years in the US market. This was not preordained. Despite the heavy presence of Japanese vehicles in this country for decades—which, itself, had taken quite awhile to establish—the influx of Korean vehicles required new familiarization and perhaps a leap of faith, a leap that was given a tremendous head start with Kia's unprecedented 10-year/10,000-mile warranty.

The battle for logic is won. Now it's time to tackle the soul. Speaking of which, Kia logs its current transformation by the benchmark of what has happened "since Soul"—the smash kit Kia Soul.

HEAD MEETS HEART

Kia has consistently presented solid, well-conceived vehicles. Their build quality, feature set and even styling have rapidly adapted to North American tastes and feedback. Left-brain qualities such as purchase price economy and fuel economy have been well established. But the Kia Soul was the first showroom-tangible evidence of a new design-led transformation within the brand.



Photo: Greg Jarem

How many automakers have tried to come up with a distinctive face across their lineup, only to make us wish they hadn't? Kia has really nailed it with their "Tiger Nose" grille, especially in this latest iteration on the new Optima. Kudos to Kia Design Center America. Note the striking repeat of this shape above the windshield.

Kia is now ready to add what they term an "emotional connection" with the customer's right brain. The time is ripe for a giant leap forward by Kia—and it has already begun. In one of the

industry's most aggressive product launch cycles, Kia has in short order introduced the all-new Soul, Forte and Koup, and a new Sorento, to be followed by a new Sportage and a Sorento SX. Today

they launch the all-new Optima, soon the Forte 5-Door—and more is promised following that.

The effort is bearing fruit, with sales up 9.6% year to date. The company had its best first quarter, second quarter and first half-year ever. The all-new Sorento has been their number-one seller since its January launch, finding 9000 new homes per month. Kia sold 3 million vehicles by March. Five months this year have set monthly sales records. And residual values are up over 6 percent, twice the industry rate.

Kia's strongest sales and market share areas are the Northeast, Great Lakes, Atlanta, south Florida, Texas, California, the Pacific Northwest—and Arizona, all identified as stylish and affluent markets. "Since Soul," sales are up 38 percent in the West (LA-PHX-SF-SEA) and 79% in the Northeast. Sales success begets dealer satisfaction, now standing at 4th best out of some 30-40 brands. The stage is set for one of Kia's most ambitious moves: introducing an all-new Optima to take on the important midsize sedan segment.

THE NEW OPTIMA IS BORN

The 2011 Kia Optima derives from the Ray concept (see next page), a plug-in electric hybrid presented at the Chicago Auto Show last February. The production Optima (developed in both their

Irvine and Frankfurt, Germany studios) is tamed a bit from the concept, but on a continuum from the preceding Optima to the Ray concept, the new car breaks ground at every level.

The first two generations of the Optima got the job done, but didn't get the blood pumping. Not so, the third. Fit and finish are tops. Color and trim options abound. The designers have given the Optima a very driver-oriented interior and the brand's Tiger Nose grille, a stylish identifier on all the most recent models which has evolved to its most stunning yet in this iteration.

WELCOME ABOARD

Kia has given itself an enormous assignment with the new Optima: to make inroads in a market dominated by the Toyota Camry, Honda Accord and the new Ford Fusion. To do so by offering the same affordability, fuel economy and extreme warranty, while incorporating features normally found in a vehicle at least one class up, plus increased space (2" more front legroom, spacious rear seating, a larger trunk and split folding rear seats). For the emotional side, says Ralph Tjoa, Senior Product Strategy Manager, major restyling provides "the antidote to sedandom." Inside and out, the Optima is intended to fit "like a perfectly

KEEP RIGHT >>

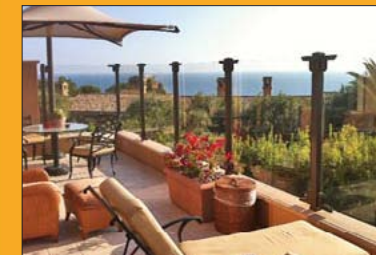
KIA OPTIMIZES
ANOTHER
KEY SEGMENT

BY JOE SAGE



SO CAL TRAVEL NOTES

This event was held in Newport Coast CA, aptly nicknamed "the Pacific Riviera." We had our choice of airports, but the handiest and most obvious is the one with three names: Orange County, a.k.a. John Wayne, a.k.a. Santa Ana (code: SNA). We flew to John Wayne Airport on US Airways.



Lodging was at the Pelican Hill Resort, a 504-acre resort complex of bungalows and villas, with ocean views, also featuring 54 holes of golf (36 Championship holes), spa facilities, dining and meeting/event space.

The resort has a sprawling campus-like layout, with staff always at the ready to



transport you by cart, but also offering great strolls among the major points. The days started and ended with an ocean view from our bungalow. 15-foot ceilings in the rooms, along with oversized collonades, doors and windows throughout the property, add to an overall feeling of comfort and elbow room. Meals at the hotel's restaurants were superb, as was the ambience.

Outdoors among the villas and bungalows, ample grassy lawns that were home to static displays of the new Kia Optima were transformed at night into an outdoor movie theater, complete with popcorn and candy.



The resort has large swimming pools, walking/jogging pathways, and large common living areas with comfortable furnishings and fireplaces, in the main building. The surrounding neighborhood is reportedly populated, appropriately enough, by nothing but billionaires.—JS



Photos: Greg Jarem (4)

tailored fine Italian suit."

Does it work? Right from the get-go. As we arrived at our destination in California, staff at the hosting facility were abuzz. How much is it? When can we get one? They loved it. In the morning mist, early walkers were pausing to study it in detail, even parked amid Mercedes and Ferrari.

Kia has everybody's attention.

DRIVE TIME & FEATURES

Our drive took us right out of the developed lowlands of Irvine and into the Santa Ana Mountains. The winding and altitude-gaining two-lane Ortega Highway would be a challenge for any car. Our new midsize sedan did exceptionally well. Power was plentiful, steering demonstrated no noticeable torque, and handling was flat and smooth.

The front seats are heated, but—perfect for Arizona—they also have class-exclusive cooling. "Once you try it, there's no going back," their engineers say, and that gets no debate from us. In addition, there is a refrigerated glove box. Kia had

provided us with bottled water, which was kept mildly cool, with our a/c not running very high.

The Infinity audio system is from HARMAN of Farmington Hills, Michigan. The purpose-built 12-speaker premium system has a 550-watt amp and advanced Digital Signal Processing (DSP), with a 100mm center speaker and a 200mm dual voice coil subwoofer in the rear deck. The result? Every seating position receives optimized sound. You can enjoy broadcast, satellite, iPod/MP3, or other sources via built-in jacks and USB. We've been in plenty of cars in which the sound system cost a third of what this whole car (including audio) costs, that didn't hold a candle to the dramatic sound quality of this Infinity system.

YOUR NEW OPTIMA

The 2011 Optima is available with two all-new, fuel-efficient Theta II 4-cylinder powerplants. A 2.4-liter GDI engine produces 200 hp, while upgrading to the smaller but more potent 2.0L turbo GDI (EX Turbo and SX models) delivers 274 hp of V6-like power.

The 2.4L is mated to a six-speed automatic. A six-speed manual is available only with the LX model. All automatics feature Sportmatic® clutchless shifting. The 2.4L boasts 24/35 mpg (city/highway) with manual and 24/34 mpg with automatic transmission, while the 2.0L turbo achieves 22/34 mpg (automatic only). Power/fuel numbers for the Optima place it at the top of its segment. A 2.4-liter hybrid Optima will be introduced in 2011.

All models have direct fuel injection, power rack-and-pinion steering, independent MacPherson strut and coil spring front suspension, independent multi-link/coil rear suspension, antiroll bars front and rear, high-performance dampers, and four-wheel power disc brakes with ABS. The front discs are larger on the 2.0L turbo models, and the SX has black front calipers.

The 2011 Optima is available with four different wheel sizes and styles. Two are 18 inches, the first time two of the largest have been offered. The interior features mood lighting, derived from the Soul. A panoramic sunroof is another class-

exclusive feature, with automatic sliding blind function, essential under the blazing Arizona sun. And when things cool off, there's a heated steering wheel—yes, another class-exclusive feature.

The Kia Optima LX is the base model with the less powerful engine, but available with either manual or automatic shift. The EX is available with either engine, but automatic only. And the SX has the more powerful 2.0L turbo, also with automatic only. Pushbutton start, more power options, leather and power/heated/cooled seats, the panoramic sunroof and many more options kick in at the EX level. Navigation, backup camera, Infinity premium sound and dual-zone climate control are available on all but the LX manual.

Standard safety features include six airbags, front active headrests, side-impact door beams, advanced seatbelts and child anchors, tire pressure monitoring, electronic stability control (ESC), traction control, a brake assist system (BAS) and hill assist control (HAC).

MAKING MARKET INROADS

Knowing that displacing current Camry, Accord and Fusion customers is a tall order, Kia has its eye on Generation X, those roughly in their 30s and 40s. Income and demographics are right, and market research has shown this group to be self-sufficient, self-reliant and pragmatic—i.e. not bur-

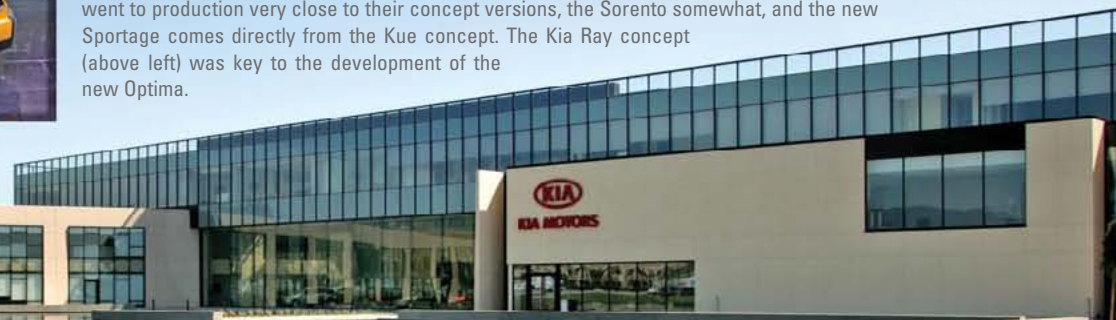
dened by preconceptions. In focus groups, the Optima rated #1 with this group on first impressions; and after more details were provided, it was still #1. As this group has matured, they find themselves in a place they had never imagined: in need of a midsize sedan. They are very research-oriented, emotional as well as practical, and willing to take a calculated risk. Calling their own product a calculated risk may sound like damning with faint praise, but research shows the calculations are in their favor (and the risk not really perceived): with earlier models, the conclusion to buy an Optima registered a degree of disappointment, but with the new model, customers are very excited.

BOTTOM LINE

Kia is very confident about their new Optima, saying it "will become the standard other midsize cars are compared to." That's a strong statement, and whereas it may be a little new to be the number one benchmark, we can guarantee you the competition will be studying it in depth.

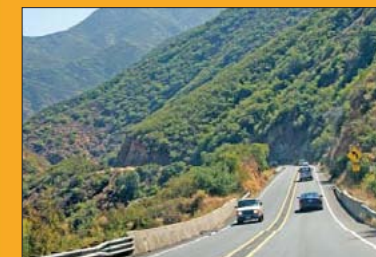
If you're shopping the midsize sedan category—one of the most useful and popular—you will absolutely want the Kia Optima on your list, at or near the top. Pricing had not been established by the time of the media launch, but Kia says the Optima will start under \$20,000, probably in the lower 19s. It will be extremely competitive. ■

TRANSFORMED BY DESIGN: To get a feel for the process whereby an enormous market segment is tackled by a smaller company, we headed to the Kia Design Center America, in Irvine. We found a facility that is staggeringly well-outfitted for the task. Kia used to share a team and facility with parent company Hyundai, not far away. Chief Designer Tom Kearns recruited his own team and provided considerable input into the new facility. There are some 27 major design studios in the region, but Kearns describes the Kia Design Center as more than a creative think tank: it is part of the production path. Designers and digital sculptors bring ideation sketches to full digital renderings, transmitted to a virtual reality room for review at full size, on three screens. Five digital sculptors are housed next to a modeling room able to generate eight full-size projects at one time, one of the largest in the region. Computer-carved clay models are wrapped in a paint-keyed coating that mimics metal. A color and trim room is flooded with clerestory natural light. The sculptors create one-off items such as lamps, wheels and interior details. The finished model is displayed in a viewing courtyard, with three turntables. We are shown the development of the Kia Soulster concept (lower left). We want one. It's enough to make you marvel at how designs ever succeeded in the pre-digital era. Compromises from concept show car to production are highly eliminated with this level of control and preview during development. Kearns points out that, indeed, the Kia Soul, Forte and Koup went to production very close to their concept versions, the Sorento somewhat, and the new Sportage comes directly from the Kue concept. The Kia Ray concept (above left) was key to the development of the new Optima.



OUR DRIVE ROUTE

Our drive started at the Kia Design Center America in Irvine, thus beginning with some urban surface street and freeway time. Kia headquarters is some 8-10 miles from the ocean, but only about three miles from the hills. We took a longer route out of town, to California 74, the Ortega Highway, from San

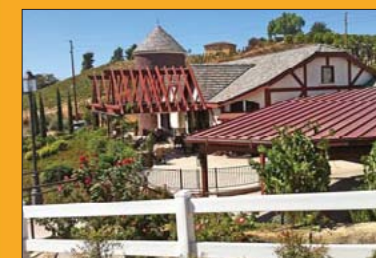


Juan Capistrano to Lake Elsinore. Google this road, and you'll see it was a spectacular test drive (on which the Optima did well).

During a break and driver change at Hell's Kitchen, a popular biker stop, a forest fire broke out nearby (and the power went out). The next hour or so were shared with



a stream of fire, forest and sheriff's vehicles, while helicopters buzzed overhead. Ultimately, the fire was fairly quickly contained, fortunate in challenging terrain and with Santa Ana winds due overnight.



Lunch was at the Leonesse Cellars Winery in Temecula Wine Country, at an outdoor buffet overlooking the vineyards.

We then headed back west to the fringes of Oceanside, and up the coast through Dana Point to Newport—involving Orange, Riverside and San Diego Counties in all.—JS