

Familiar but 80 percent new.

A quick revisit with a consistently solid vehicle. by Joe Sage

Some 80 percent of the 2014 Kia Sorento is either new or significantly updated. But it looks about the same. Sales are strong, and Kia has been smart enough to not mess with a good thing. Yet what is new for 2014 is extensive.

The engine lineup is revised, with a 3.3-liter V6 introduced in the SX model, which we are driving here. For the base-trim LX model, there is a new four-cylinder GDI, still 2.4L but replacing the prior MPI design. (The V6 is an option on the LX, while the midrange EX has become all V6, like the SX.)

An electronically-controlled 6-speed automatic is new, with overdrive and Sportmatic functions.

Hydraulic power steering has been replaced by MDPS—electric motor-driven power steering—which has comfort, normal and sport settings.

Chassis rigidity is increased by 18 percent, via reengineering of suspension and other details.

Front and rear sheetmetal are updated, and headlights receive LED accents, but overall the Sorento remains immediately recognizable. A programmable power liftgate is available, and the panorama sunroof includes a power sunshade.

Inside are a revised instrument panel, color-keyed LED accent lighting, available power-folding side mirrors (on our SX model), sliding sun-

shades for the second row, available ventilated front seats and other updates.

Electronics are expanded (but not pushed into unwelcome overkill), with the addition of blind spot detection and integration of Kia's UVO eServices infotainment system with voice command navigation—clean and well implemented.

Also new for 2014 is a Sorento SX Limited top-trim, a notch above the SX shown here. The SX-L—in black, white or grey—features self-leveling xenon HID headlights, exclusive 19-inch chrome wheels with red brake calipers, nappa leather-trimmed seats, a heated wood-trimmed steering wheel, heated rear seats and soft-touch headliner and pillars. The SX-L can set you back up to \$5100 more than an SX—a psychological bump from \$35,000 to just above \$40,000, if you play apples and oranges and compare a front-wheel-drive SX with an all-wheel-drive SX-L.

The AWD option is actually available on every model (for \$1800). An entry-level EX with FWD starts at just \$24,100. Look at our SX (see sidebar) with its one notable option—the significant third row that brings it from five passengers to seven,

still within the same tight 106.3-inch wheelbase, 15-foot-4.6-inch overall length and convenient 35.8-foot turning circle (amazingly close to that of a MINI)—and you'll see there is a very capable Sorento at any reasonable price point.

We had three minor beefs, all of which can probably be mitigated. One was its propensity to lay a patch of rubber when starting up from a red light or when cornering on a freeway approach. Tire pressure was uniform (no TPM warning) but measured down a few pounds when cold, so it could be just that. (The tires had only about 4000 miles on 'em.) The rear hatch's power operation would not allow a manual override; that's starting to catch on, and we would welcome it here. And the pleasant little song the vehicle plays upon entry made us reach for our phone as many times as not—we'd like to just turn that off.

Yep, petty stuff. But that's the point. As our log-

book noted, these represented "kind of a flawed experience in small ways, as opposed to perfect, because everything that's not a minor flaw has been pretty much perfect."

We've driven the Sorento pretty regularly over the past few years, including this 2014 model at its new vehicle launch here in Arizona last winter. We've liked it those times, and, not surprisingly, we took to it right away this time.

Basically with the Kia Sorento you can be set for life: it's capable enough that you don't find yourself still needing a classic big SUV, and it's nimble enough that you don't really wish for something smaller. It's an ideal size, with a huge greenhouse and tight maneuverability. Its 290 horsepower gives it plenty of punch, and the V6 has a nice growl. Fuel economy could still drive you to something smaller, but an easy \$1000 to bring this up to seven passengers will keep most people from having to go larger. ■

KIA SORENTO SX FWD

ENGINE.....	3.3L DOHC GDI CVT V6
TRANSMISSION.....	6-speed auto w/Sportmatic
HORSEPOWER.....	290 hp
TORQUE.....	252 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN.....	FWD
PAINT/INTERIOR.....	Remington Red / Black
WHEELS/TIRES.....	19x7.5 / 235/55 R19
STEERING.....	electric motor driven PS
TURNING CIRCLE.....	35.8 feet
BRAKES (DISC) FR/R.....	11.9" vent / 11.9" solid
PASSENGERS.....	5 standard; 7 as tested
TOWING CAPACITY.....	3500 lb
FUEL CAPACITY.....	17.43 gal (66 liters)
FUEL.....	Regular unleaded (87 octane)
EMISSION RATING.....	50-state LEV-II (ULEV)
MPG (EST).....	18/25/21 city/hwy/comb

BASE.....	\$35,000
• 50/50 split folding 3rd row seat and rear A/C.....	\$1000
• Cargo net.....	\$50
• Destination.....	\$850
TOTAL.....	\$36,900

