

SUBTLE HUGE NEWS (B)

Enough changes for a new category name and new markets

STORY BY JOE SAGE
PHOTOS BY GREG JAREM

You may have thought you knew that ubiquitous beast, the minivan. Such a vehicle offers a high degree of usefulness and practicality, perfect for raising a family. But it turns out that half the segment's buyers now do not have kids. A couple of generational swells have moved through the minivan era, and competitors are dropping out (while prices have risen 17 percent over the past five years.)

These buyers' evolving lifestyles likely include such things as pets, antiques and projects, road trips and lots of friends. Yet while these empty nesters have shown signs of rejecting minivan style and design, they have remained attached to the category's basic attributes.

To compete—or excel—in today's market, Kia is catching the front of this wave. They are taking traditional minivan values such as comfort, safety and utility and marrying them to attributes such as sportiness and a greater sense of driver involvement. They are appealing to shoppers who may be thinking twice about

their favorite vehicle—perhaps moving to an SUV or crossover, or even a sportier sedan or a coupe. With all this in mind, the Kia Sedona has been transformed.

The new vehicle is redone to the point that Kia prefers not to think of its third-generation Sedona particularly as a minivan at all. The changes are subtle enough to satisfy the loyal minivan customer, but significant enough to deliver a whole new experience—and with it perhaps some new customers. Kia says there is nothing “mini” in the new Sedona and suggests we call it a Multi-Purpose Vehicle.

Actually, the vehicle is marketed worldwide, but only in the US has it been generally known as a minivan. Sliding rear doors may be a heritage niche giveaway.

Nonetheless, from style and stance to performance, the 2015 Kia Sedona brings a moderate seismic change to the table.

Let's start with its stance. The wheelbase is over ten feet, with all four wheels pushed noticeably toward chassis corners. This is about more than just style, as it not

only creates sportier handling, but also allows for generous ingress in the front, and all the moreso through enormous rear sliding doors, with increased cargo space and increased room for occupants in all rows, as well as clearance for flat tracks behind the Slide-N-Stow second row seats (which one person can easily fold up against the front seats), removing obstacles for third-row access. This is also the only such vehicle with heated second row seats (8-passenger version), again emphasizing its adult nature, front and rear.

Nappa leather reclining First Class Lounge seats in row two of the top trim SX Limited let pampered passengers stretch out fully, utilizing the most second-row space in the segment, for a trans-oceanic business class seat experience.

Those second row seats may make you want to be a passenger in your own vehicle, if you ever get the chance. On the other hand, you may never want to leave the driver's seat. We drove the Sedona on a Southern California route we've used

for the sportiest of test launches. If you never look over your shoulder (where rear visibility is, by the way, excellent), you truly might never know you were in, well, a minivan. We cruised stretches of freeway, but we also tackled steep and tightly winding mountain two-lanes with speed and agility—and passed a few slowpokes.

Inside, the paradigm has also shifted. As has the shifter—from instrument panel to console. It turns out the minivan-classic pass-through feature thus created previously was either never used, used for other things, or if used to move about was unsafe, anyway. This is a big step toward the new Sedona's conventional vehicle look and feel—leading also to space for an 8-inch UVO eServices screen, while creating a horizontal driver-centric cockpit, as well as two gloveboxes. The overall impression is clean and modern—now more tech-friendly than jelly-sandwich-ready.

The new Sedona uses 76 percent ultra-

high and high-strength steel—eclipsing the 36 percent of former best-in-class Honda Odyssey—for a solid ride, more strength and better energy flow in a crash.

If your kids are beyond jelly sandwiches but still borrowing the keys, the Sedona offers geofencing, as well as curfew and speed alerts. And for everyone, there are Sirius real-time traffic, weather and fuel pricing, plus Yelp and other features.

There is quite a trim level range (see sidebar), something for every budget or purpose, with a value equation throughout. If you find second-row lounge seating irresistible (it's hard not to), you move straight to the top. If the basic handsome, safe, spirited and useful package works for you, you have a great bargain entry point. For leather, your bump from L to LX is just \$2200, which includes other upgrades, too. There are many variables, and of course ways to option most of them somewhere in between. ■

A modern, driver-centric instrument panel and shifter set the tone for this evolved vehicle, fulfilled by the segment's most spacious second row (with available First Class Lounge reclining seats) and still plenty of utility (third row access is easier than ever). It all takes the 2015 Kia Sedona beyond what's been known as the minivan, we think even echoing aggressive style studies such as their Niro concept vehicle (lower left). Owners of all types will appreciate the Sedona's smart power liftgate, which opens hands-free (and feet-free) when it senses the key fob nearby for three seconds; you can also tailor its height to individual preference.



2015 KIA SEDONA

ENGINE	.....3.3L V6 naturally aspirated, aluminum heads, aluminum block
TRANSMISSION	.....Electronically controlled 6-speed automatic with overdrive
SEATING	.....7/8 passengers
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
HORSEPOWER	.....276 hp @ 6000 rpm
TORQUE	.....248 lb-ft @ 5200 rpm
STEERING	.....Rack & pinion hydraulic power
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.8 ft
TOW CAPACITY	.....3500 lb
CARGO VOLUME	.....total 142.0 cu.ft.
	.....behind 2nd row 78.4 cu.ft.
	.....behind 3rd row 33.9 cu.ft.
WHEELS	.....6.5x17, 6.5x18, 6.5x19 (by trim)
BRAKES	.....Power hydraulic vacuum, ABS
WEIGHT	.....4414-4720 lb
MPG	.....17/22/19 to 18/25/21 city/hwy/comb

INCLUDED [VARIES BY TRIM LEVEL(*): Body-color power-fold heated mirrors w LED turn signals(*), power sunroof two rows w tilt front row(*), solar control glass(*), heated rear glass, dual power sliding doors(*), height adjustable smart power liftgate(*), variable wipers, rear wiper/washer, projector beam headlights, LED markers(*), fog lights(*), LED taillights(*), roof rails(*), keyless entry (all) plus start (EX and up), AM-FM-CD-MP3-Sirius (Infinity audio upper trim levels), Bluetooth-USB, wheel-mounted controls, UVO infotainment (some w eServices), rear camera(*), backup warning (all), front-rear park assist (SX Ltd), blind spot detection and rear cross traffic(*), drive mode select(*), cooling glovebox(*), leather seats(*), lumbar support(*), heated front seats(*), vented front seats(*), slide-n-stow 2nd row seats (up to SX), first class 2nd row lounge seats (SX Ltd).

L BASE PRICE	.....\$25,900
LX	.....28,100
EX	.....32,100
SX	.....36,100
SX LIMITED	.....39,700
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....895

KIA MILESTONES: 20 YEARS IN US

Kia is celebrating its 20th anniversary in the US. Steady model updates have included 16 new or significantly redesigned vehicles in the last five years, seven in 2013 alone. Kia passed half a million sales for the second straight year in 2013, with all-time records for Optima (155,000) and Soul. 2014 brought the flagship K900. Kia began 2014 as the 7th largest US brand by volume. Kia achieved its first-ever top ten ranking in the JD Power 2013 US Initial Quality Study (IQS); a move up Interbrand's Top 100 Best Global Brands list and a spot on its Best Global Green Brands list; Sorento and Optima named to Kelley Blue Book's "10 Best Under \$25,000" lists; Soul best-in-segment in the JD Power IQS; and the Cadenza and Forte the first Kia vehicles to win major auto enthusiast magazine comparison tests. ■

