

SUBTLE HUGE NEWS (A)

Breakthrough technology delivered in a very familiar package **STORY BY JOE SAGE PHOTOS BY GREG JAREM**

Kia has offered an alternative powertrain in the Optima Hybrid sedan since 2012. First cousin Hyundai has a Sonata Hybrid sedan and has now entered a less-populated realm, with a 2015 Tucson Fuel Cell model (for lease only and in Southern California only, to start).

Kia has mostly concentrated on an impressive breed of small but potent high-efficiency gasoline engines to deliver highly competitive fuel economy—which has brought great success in mileage ratings, on the dealers' books and through a great many industry awards.

So an electric vehicle from Kia is big news—an important move into an emerging technology. Applying it to the Soul is more subtle. Using a familiar, approachable model is appropriate to the increasing mainstreaming of the electric vehicle

option—and it ensures broad spectrum affordability. Thus, they deliver a comfortable flavor of the latest thing.

Kia attributes a significant leap forward in their brand awareness and sales since the unveiling of the original Soul in 2008. "Before Soul" and "since Soul" became their product and market benchmarks.

Will we soon talk in terms of "before EV" and since? Could this effort lead to an EV in every garage? It's too early to tell, but it will be interesting to watch unfold. And our experience so far is promising.

We traveled to Southern California to meet the 2015 Kia Soul EV, where project manager Steve Kosowski identified the core reasons they picked this hot-selling model as the basis for Kia's first EV. The vehicle is already a high-profile representative of the Kia brand and is considered

cool. It's a good urban size, already delivering efficiency, utility and function in its gasoline version. Structurally, the battery pack could be added readily underneath.

The car contains a lot of new technology, notably a battery pack claiming higher energy density in its cells than Leaf, Focus, BMW and others. This not only provides the juice, but it enables a smaller pack (see middle photo at lower right), equating to more interior space, a lower center of gravity and better crash zones.

The pack addresses thermal stability and degradation over time, providing a much more reliable "distance to empty," thus promising to remove one mystifying layer from EV ownership. Other efficiencies also increase the Soul EV's range. Its HVAC system offers a heat-pump system to reverse energy losses, and a setting for

driver-only ventilation. Energy consumption is reduced by 27 percent.

Other efficiencies are familiar in the EV realm: super low rolling resistance tires, advanced aerodynamic touches and regenerative braking (a third-gen system).

The Soul EV also has a different grille than a regular Soul, special wheels and a modified rear fascia with LED taillights. The interior uses bio-based materials, including plastics made from corn and sugar rather than petroleum. The car is available in blue and white, or pure white. Red and black will follow, as will silver.

You can use your smartphone for 911 or call center contacts, to check your battery state and range from anywhere, to doublecheck or apply door locks, to heat or cool the car while parked, to locate charging stations, or to schedule home charging during lower rate periods.

Kia points out that only the Tesla S can beat the Soul EV's EPA-estimated 93-mile range, quickly reminding us that theirs includes a \$70,000 purchase cost.

If there's one immediate, overall and lasting impression we received from the launch drive, it was that the Soul EV was

tailor-made for its task and its niche, could perform seamlessly as regular transportation within the vast sprawling suburbs of a huge metropolitan region—equal parts novel and familiar, but with the basic experience definitely familiar.

The Soul EV does not make you live as though you've just signed on to somebody's science project. You'll find enough novelty in it to entertain yourself and feel good about your little breakthrough beast, but you will live with it just about as normally as any other 'round-towner. We anticipate it will take no time at all for this vehicle to have completely settled into your life as the new normal.

The Kia Soul EV will be sold with a simple grade strategy: a base model and a Plus ("+" model (see details at right). The car can be leased for \$249/month.

The Kia Soul EV is first available right next door in California, based on a high sales rate and significant charging infrastructure. Next year they will add Oregon, then the East Coast, then Atlanta, Austin and so forth—by customer demand.

If you're interested, make the call. Kia expects demand to outstrip supply. ■



2015 KIA SOUL EV + (PLUS)

POWER.....109-hp (81.4 kW) AC synchronous electric motor. 27 kWh lithium ion polymer battery. 6.6 kW on-board charger (OBC). DC fast charge port (480V). Regenerative braking system.

TRANSMISSION.....1-speed gear reduction

DRIVETRAIN.....FVD

HORSEPOWER.....109 hp @ 2730-8000 rpm

TORQUE.....210 lb-ft

STEERING.....Motor-driven power steering

TURNING CIRCLE.....34.8 ft

WHEELS.....16-inch alloy

BRAKES.....Power 4-wheel disc, 11.8" vented front, 11.1" solid rear, regenerative @ 9-12 percent kinetic energy recovery; electronic parking brake.

WEIGHT.....3289 lb

MPGe.....120 city / 92 highway / 105 comb

RANGE.....(EPA est.) 93 miles

ZERO-TO-60.....11.2 seconds

INCLUDED: Advanced front airbags, side front airbags, full-length curtain airbags, child seat anchors-tethers, ABS, brake assist, ESC, vehicle stability, TPMS, electronically powered AC and heat pump HVAC, 8-inch nav and UVO, 3 months SiriusXM, USB-aux jacks, Bluetooth, EV charging station locator, energy usage monitor, leather seat trim, heated/vented front seats, heated rear outboard seats, 60/40 split rear seats, keyless entry/start, tilt/tele steering wheel, park assist with front/rear sensors, 3.5-inch OLED cluster, rear camera, front fog lights, lighted sliding charge port door, heated power-fold mirrors with turn signal indicators.

WARRANTY

10 years / 100,000 miles powertrain
10 years / 100,000 miles battery
5 years / 60,000 miles basic
5 years / 60,000 miles roadside assist

"+" (PLUS) BASE PRICE\$35,700

CARPETED FLOOR MATS:125

DESTINATION CHARGE:.....800

"+" (PLUS) TOTAL.....\$36,625

(FEDERAL TAX CREDIT):**(\$7500)

"+" (PLUS) TOTAL AFTER CREDIT...\$29,125

2015 KIA SOUL EV (BASE)

NOTE: Our test example, shown in photos at left and specs above, was the "+" (Plus) model, which adds features and amenities such as leather seat trim, front/rear sensors and parking assist, front fog lights, projector beams and more. Other noted features and inclusions are the same on the Base model, including the generous warranty. (A list of modest options is available for either.)

BASE MODEL BASE PRICE\$33,700

(FEDERAL TAX CREDIT):**(\$7500)

BASE TOTAL AFTER CREDIT.....\$26,200

****FEDERAL TAX CREDIT NOTE:** Your Kia dealer, accountant and/or government offices can give you complete details on tax brackets, marital status, timeline and other details.