

BEAUTIFUL TOUGH WEATHER BEAUTIFUL TOUGH SORENTO

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A number of factors have turned Kia from a virtual unknown into a king over the past decade and a half. They talk about the Soul as a turning point in brand awareness. Another quiet giant has been the Kia Sorento.

Introduced in 2002 as a body-on-frame midsize SUV, the Sorento for 2016 enters its third generation. (We drove it in late 2014, but it goes on sale after January 2, 2015, as a 2016 model.) The second generation came in the immediate wake of the Soul, changing to unibody construction, incorporating its own version of the distinctive tiger nose grille, and modernizing inside and out. This lasted for six or seven years, with just one more mild, evolutionary refresh along the way—a wise move on something this successfully conceived and popularly received.

Evolutionary wisdom is apparent here, too, as the 2016 Sorento carries DNA and styling cues from its forebear, in a completely new, restyled and reengineered vehicle that is a bit longer, a hair higher and introduces seven-passenger seating.

Sorento is actually a not-so-quiet giant. Anecdotally, we notice how often we are in traffic behind two or three at a time. Statistically, this is borne out by US sales of over 100,000 in each of the past five years.

Sorento was, in fact, the first Kia model to sell over 100,000 in a year (which Optima and Soul now also do). It was also the first Kia manufactured in the US (in West Point, Georgia, where the Optima is now also built). The all-American Sorento was also the first Kia to be featured in a Super Bowl ad (“Space Babies” was the humorous launch of the campaign in which Kia

Sorento “has an answer for everything”).

Take all that as baseline. Customer satisfaction and build quality ratings confirm that Kia has now fully arrived. We flew to Reno and headed to Lake Tahoe, to confirm it all behind the wheel of the 2016 Kia Sorento. Here, executive VP of sales and marketing Michael Sprague described a new dawn. “We are a brand new brand,” he told us. “Kia’s next era is underway.”

Kia is after Jeep Grand Cherokee buyers, but even leapfrogging that goal, by creating a seven-passenger capacity in its V6 Sorento (and optionally on a four-cylinder LX).

The V6 is noteworthy for its new passenger count, but other big news for 2016 is a 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbo, available as an EX or top-trim SX-Limited. And a tough choice this may make (though it’s

the kind of “tough” win-win choice you will welcome). The slightly less expensive four-cylinder turbo actually out-torques the V6, at 260 lb-ft versus 252. However, the V6 has more towing capacity (5000 lbs on AWD models)—and has those seven seats. The price differential between turbo four and V6 is small (see chart), so if you have a big head count or a lot to tow, and want top trim features, an SX-Limited turbo for \$1400 more is pretty much a win-win. For the EX, a \$600 difference is close to negligible, though the turbo has slight power and weight advantages, if you don’t have the passengers or the towing needs.

On our drive, it was hard to tell the difference between the engines, due to the weatherman, not the Kia engineers—we had high winds, torrential rain and blowing snow. (The winds were so high, a forecast two feet of snow did not accumulate, but rather blew straight to Kansas, we guess.) Weather had reduced the



2016 KIA SORENTO

KIA SORENTO L, LX

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| ENGINE |2.4L 4-cyl |
| HORSEPOWER/TORQUE |185 hp / 178 lb-ft |
| SEATING CAPACITY |5-passenger (7 avail on LX) |
| BASE PRICE | L (FWD)\$24,900 |
| | LX (FWD)\$26,200 |
| | +AWD (n/a on L)add \$1800 |

KIA SORENTO EX, SX-Limited

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| ENGINE |2.0L 4-cyl turbo |
| HORSEPOWER/TORQUE |240 hp / 260 lb-ft |
| SEATING CAPACITY |5-passenger |
| BASE PRICE | EX (FWD)\$31,100 |
| | SX-Limited (FWD)\$39,900 |
| | +AWDadd \$1800 |

KIA SORENTO LX V6, EX V6, SX V6, SX-Limited V6

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ENGINE |3.3L V6 |
| HORSEPOWER/TORQUE |290 hp / 252 lb-ft |
| SEATING CAPACITY |7-passenger |
| BASE PRICE | LX V6 (FWD)\$28,300 |
| | EX V6 (FWD)\$31,700 |
| | SX V6 (FWD)\$37,900 |
| | SX-Limited V6 (FWD)\$41,300 |
| | +AWDadd \$1800 |

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|----------------------|---|
| TRANSMISSION |6-spd electronic auto w Sportmatic |
| FUEL CAPACITY/OCTANE |18.8 gal / 87 regular gas |
| STEERING |Motor-driven power steering |
| TURNING CIRCLE |FWD 36.2 ft / AWD 36.4 ft |
| TOWING CAPACITY |2.4L (L, LX): 2000 lb |
| |2.0L turbo (EX, SX-Lim): 3500 lb |
| |3.3L V6: 3500 FWD / 5000 lb AWD |



At \$1800, we would opt for all-wheel-drive without hesitation. The 2016 Sorento’s new intelligent system brags near-zero lag time from a perceived condition to implementation. Torque vector control, which combines imperceptible braking with judicious application of the AWD system, also minimizes or eliminates any on-road surprises. Our drive was in every possible highly challenging condition, with zero disquieting moments.

Everything from body rigidity to underbody aerodynamics gave us a very quiet and luxurious ride. But if you want to drown out all this quiet, you have a Kia hallmark—630-watt 12-speaker audio from Infinity, always top-flight and at a reasonable price. This system includes Harman’s remarkable new Clari-Fi digital music reconstruction feature, which uses algorithms to recreate richness of sound lost in music compression, extremely welcome and commendable after a decade of listening to MP3.



finer points of drivetrain comparison, although we know from other Kia models we've driven that it's just as you would expect—they are both smooth and solid, and power is about equal, with a little quicker curve from the turbo.

Formal fuel mileage figures have not been released yet, though we expect all engines to score well. Preliminary figures put the base 2.4L at 29 MPG highway and 25 combined; the 2.0L turbo at 27 MPG highway and 23 combined; and the V6 at 21 MPG combined.

Drive mode select offers sport, normal and eco settings, each of which gave us fine results, though we didn't spend much time in eco, in these conditions.

We love it when weather takes a turn for the worse on these trips, since it's so often same-same, perfect-perfect back home in Arizona. Sometimes this can get us into "be careful what you wished for" territory, but not with these wheels under our feet. The 2016 Kia Sorento provided us with a cozy, safe, comfortable and fully-featured cocoon, welcome on a nasty day in the high country. Typhoons raged outside, but we had solid grip, smooth control and clear visibility at all times—all equally welcome on errands around town.

Interior visibility is excellent even as Sorento design evolution includes a higher body-to-glass ratio, for a more rugged look and feel, emphasized by a power bulge rising from the headlights and running through smooth but strong contours to a high cowl point at the A-pillars.

One reason for the secure feeling inside is increased aerodynamics, with a .33 Cd owed in no small part to weather-quieting underbody treatments. Another is wide-ranging attention to the interior, adding premium textures and soft-touch surfaces throughout—even a fully-carpeted cargo area right up onto the wheel wells. Still another is the Sorento's increased use of high-strength steel—more than double that of the prior—resulting in a 14 percent increase in total rigidity.

The new Sorento's rear seats fold flat, one method being a simple lever in the rear cargo area. That cargo area can be accessed via a next-gen intelligent power liftgate, which responds to your behaviors and needs based on an algorithm of time and distance, not just for example awkward wiggles of your foot, as with some.

The new Sorento sees itself as taking on not just the Grand Cherokee, but such variety as the Nissan Murano or Subaru Outback. This underscores the third row dividend of Sorento's new seven-seat layout, in a vehicle that—in everything from price to visual perception—is intended to compete in the minds of these vehicles' buyers. And Sorento's tow capacities—up to 5000 lb—are hard to beat, except by the five-seat Jeep Grand Cherokee.

A lot of the new 2016 Kia Sorento's styling language was forecast in the Cross GT concept at the Chicago show just a year and a half ago (see sidebar). We love it when a concept that strong soon sees the light of day, as it has here. ■



The 2016 Kia Sorento draws heavily from the very recent Cross GT concept revealed at the Chicago show in spring 2013. The production vehicle's tow capacity, up to 5000 pounds (V6, AWD) gives it a significant competitive advantage. Increased interior volume brings the Sorento up to seven-passenger seating and/or creates storage space galore. The interior has been completely redone in terms of style, finish and function.

