

EURO SENSIBILITIES

Kia Rio is the least expensive offering from the brand that has quickly risen to number one in the prestigious JD Power Initial Quality Study (IQS) for two years running. It can be a great entry level vehicle, but is equally popular among any number of people who want something both practical and versatile, even as their only vehicle. It's also popular with those who value its smaller size—for parking, maneuverability or just general fit and feel. In fact, Kia VP of product planning Orth Hedrick, who has the entire fleet at his disposal, has made it his own personal choice for the one-hour commute to work.

This is the fourth generation of Kia's solid little subcompact that looms large as their number one best seller worldwide (branded as Rio in the US or a variety of other names in other markets), with 400,000 units sold last year. Kia expects to sell 1.6 million of this iteration.

B-segment cars are the biggest segment in Europe—home of both autobahns and ancient cities with tight streets—and in Europe this car is Kia's number one seller. Their European operations took the lead in developing the new Rio, "holding it to higher standards than some of our competitors,

who focus on emerging markets such as India and China," says Hedrick. With a focus on driving dynamics and completely updated design language, "it punches above its weight," he adds.

This Euro-designed Korean car will be American-built for our market, at Kia's West Point, Georgia plant, isolating it from currency fluctuations and allowing for localization of the supply chain.

The European influences show up in craftsmanship, efficiency, fuel economy and cost of ownership. The new Rio also adds a wide range of convenience and technology features.

Perhaps less streamlined than the outgoing model, the new Rio's form was developed with a function first philosophy. The windshield is more vertical (as is the rear), creating a more formal, stable and geometric look that not only provides more interior volume, but also relieves the driver of "subconscious head pressure" found in many

subcompacts. This also creates a longer hood, for greater presence. From the driver's seat, it feels like a bigger car. And it is—longer, wider and lower than the prior Rio (by a fraction of an inch for each dimension). A new interpretation of Kia's trademark tiger nose grille sweeps horizontally into the headlights, emphasizing its wide feel.

Inside, passenger volume in the Rio sedan is up by 1.5 cubic feet, and cargo and passenger volume are both up by several cubic feet in the 5-Door. The interior is also visually wider, emphasizing the small car's surprising spaciousness, picking up a sculpted horizontal theme already implemented in Cadenza and Niro and applied to the upcoming Stinger performance car, giving the Rio a modern, premium feel. The instrument panel is lowered for more spaciousness, with its center screen raised up for presence and accessibility. The top trim 5-Door interior is tied together by deep red panels in reengineered seats, instrument panel and doors.

An entirely new platform makes extensive use

of high-strength steel, enabling its roomy shape, as well as upgraded chassis, steering and suspension. Kia sources its steel in-house, from the metallurgists at Hyundai Motor Group, who work intimately with the body engineers. The car's completely new rear suspension is a feat in itself, with new twin tube dampers engineered to not interfere with flat load cargo space, while also opening up the tailgate area and lowering liftover height. Road noise is significantly reduced, both via structural steel changes that reduce body resonance and from joints that are both welded and use advanced adhesives that become highly rigid in the bake oven. The new car also receives more insulation and thicker carpets. It's no wonder Kia based our launch event on the cobblestone streets of historic Baltimore—we arrived in a tooth-rattling premium airport limousine, then departed in the solid comfort of the new Kia Rio subcompact.

The steering column has been reengineered from 33 to 65 splines, for far better on-center feel. Our drive route included freeway time in and out of the city and open two-lane driving through Maryland's countryside, to experience the other main goal of the new suspension, especially for one-car owners: higher stability on long-distance drives.

Power comes from a revised version of Kia's 1.6-liter Gamma engine, with a five percent increase in torque, most notably retuned to deliver below 2000 rpm, as small car drivers have consistently requested more responsive power in lower-speed daily driving conditions around town—during acceleration from the light, turning to enter traffic at a busy corner, and on the freeway ramp. Even with its new pep, fuel mileage is higher in the new Rio by about one mile per gallon in manual transmission models, two with the automatic (with the figures now about the same for both).

Kia Rio comes in three trims—LX, S and EX—LX with choice of manual or automatic transmission, the others automatic only, plus the sedan or Rio 5-Door option, a total of eight basic configurations. There are no options beyond trim inclusions.

Many features are included across the whole lineup, from steering wheel audio controls to driver assist tech including stability control and hill

start assist, with forward collision warning and autonomous emergency braking in top EX trim. LX and S have 5-inch screens, with backup camera kicking in at the S level. In top EX trim, you get a 7-inch screen with the newest iteration of Kia's UVO interface (UVO3), including Apple/Android integration (UVO3), including Apple/Android integration with voice control. You can park your smartphone in a neat dedicated tray beneath the screen. Advanced features include diagnostics, maintenance intervals and such, plus services to monitor any new drivers in your household. A very capable four-speaker audio system with SiriusXM and USB/aux inputs across the lineup adds two tweeters, front and rear USB chargers and Bluetooth in mid and top trims. Keyless entry/start and cruise control also kick in at those levels.

Prices start at just \$13,990 for a manual-shift sedan in LX trim, about a \$400 drop from the outgoing model, despite all the improvements and additions. Prices for upper trims will be available closer to the car's dealer availability later this fall. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	1.6L 4-cyl GDI
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HP/TORQUE	130 hp / 119 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd manual / 6-spd auto
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut R: compact design w/ coupled torsion beam axle w/ trailing arms; twin tube shocks
STEERING	elec power steering
BRAKES	F: 11" vented disc / R: 8" drum
WHEELS / TIRES	5.5x15 / P185/65 R15
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	5-dr: 160.0 / 101.6 in sedan: 172.6 / 101.6 in
TURNING CIRCLE	33.46 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	5.5 in
WEIGHT	manual 2648 lb / auto 2714 lb
HEADROOM (F/R)	5-dr: 38.9 / 38.0 in sedan: 38.9 / 37.4 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	42.1 / 33.5 in
LUGGAGE CAPACITY	5-dr: 32.8 / 17.4 cu.ft sedan: 13.7 cu.ft
FUEL CAPACITY	11.9 gal
MPG	manual: 29/37/32 (city/hwy/comb) auto: 28/37/32 (city/hwy/comb)
PRICE (LX)	Sedan / manual: \$13,990 Sedan / auto: 14,990 5-Door / manual: 14,290 5-Door / auto: 15,290



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