

N is out. N-line remains.

This 190-hp near-top-trim Kona has plenty to offer by Joe Sage

We drove the new second-generation 2024 Hyundai Kona at its media launch a year ago in South Carolina, after having previously driven it on track and off-road at a comparo event in Texas. This was all five and a half years after first driving gen one at its launch in Hawaii, in 2018, with a number of other gen-one drives in between, here in Arizona and at other comparo drives.

Gen two seems a bigger leap forward than it otherwise might have, as lockdowns and other interruptions may have made gen-one's lifespan go by fast. But the calendar has marched on, regardless. And there's more to this—they were not just ready for a new look, but continuing to expand their elec-

tric vehicle lineup. While the new Kona picks up key style cues from Hyundai's latest EVs, the platform itself is engineered "electric-first," its battery-ready form delivering a more generous interior and broader stance beyond the original ICE versions. (In EVs built upon existing ICE architecture, battery size is more likely to reduce other volumes.)

The cabin has almost 42 inches of front legroom and close to 40 inches (38.2) in the rear, and cargo volume of almost 64 cubic feet with rear seats down. With weights from 3005 to 3505 pounds in the ICE lineup, fuel mileage is as high as 35 mpg highway for the base engine, or 32 with the turbo.

Hyundai grew the smaller end of its crossover

lineup later than some, but then expanded it quickly, a strategy that has been a winner for Kona. Gen-one quickly exceeded its sales projections, rising to fifth place among Hyundai's 14 US models, with the growth rate continuing to increase—and this while their big SUVs also set records.

Emblematic of the change to EV emphasis is another change in the lineup for gen two. Just two years ago, when gen one was just turning four, we traveled to Atlanta for a track session with Hyundai's highest-performance N models—at that time adding the first Kona N, a 286-hp version with 6-speed manual or optional 8-speed wet dual-clutch, perhaps surprisingly still front-wheel-drive, though with an advanced differential, along with performance-built suspension and much else. The new EV-based gen-two Kona lineup, however, does not offer an N, the immediate likely result of new Eur-

opean restrictions on gasoline-powered performance vehicles, but a trend that is endemic.

This gives N-Line a higher profile. Though not a track-performance build like the N (N-Line shares its drivetrain with Limited trim), N-Line serves its purpose by delivering some of the N spirit in this derivatively-named, upfeatured standard build. And a bonus—the N-Line offers all-wheel-drive.

Setup was quick and easy, and we were on our way. Within the first block, we had already noted that the new Kona just does everything well. It's a nice size, with good power, and solid features in a decent interface. Hyundai's latest shifter is what we term an alternative device—up behind the wheel, twist up for drive, down for reverse—but it works, and we can hope it will be fairly intuitive for an inexperienced unexpected borrower.

We headed out for an hour or two of mountain highway driving—with a variety of climbs, curves and descents—a great place to apply sport mode, though it also delivered a fine ride in normal.

The ICE lineup offers two engines, each with a different transmission, and two drivetrains. Fuel mileage varies among all, but is generally 2-3 mpg higher with the base engine than the more powerful turbo. The turning circle is very tight, 34.8 feet, one of our favorite specs. It has shift by wire and motor driven steering, simple tech but all working great with never a second thought. Suspension is also simple yet effective. Hyundai has engineered all these areas to such a high degree of mastery by now, there's a lot to be said for a simple build.

We've often noted that a successful restyling may look like an extreme departure when you first see it, then without a day or two it looks just right and the prior one immediately looks dated. This is taking us a little longer with the gen-two Kona, but we had spent more time than average with gen one. The restyling is in line with Kia overall and in particular with their EV evolution. Sales are sure to remain strong for the ICE Kona, and its full-electric basis makes it ready for the long haul. ■

A persistent side story: While systems and features were generally very good, easy to find and easy to set, we don't always get deep into all of them in our allotted time. We already know Hyundai's systems urgently and repeatedly warn us about e.g. traffic light speed cameras we already know about. This time we also had ding-ding-ding! warnings, beeps and voice alerts: one telling us to take a break within just our first 10 miles; another mysteriously scolding that we had "no route set"; and a series of tire pressure warnings, one informing us that the 'bad one' was, uh, exactly the same as the other three; and a couple of other even more head-scratching variants. Funny not funny. We're fairly confident (or hopeful) that all or most could be overridden, but by any definition they are annoying.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Ulsan, S Korea
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	S Korea / S Korea
PARTS CONTENT	US/Can 3%; S Korea 90%
ENGINE	1.6L 4-cyl turbo GDI 16v DOHC
HP/TORQUE	190 hp / 195 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.0:1
TRANSMISSION	8-spd auto, paddles
DRIVETRAIN	active on-demand AWD
SUSPENSION	F: MacPherson strut, gas shocks, stblzr bar; R: multi-link, gas shocks, stblzr bar
STEERING	col-mtd, motor-driven
BRAKES	F: 12x0 vented; R: 11.2 solid
WHEELS	19-in N Line alloys
TIRES	235/45R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	172.6 / 104.7 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(AWD, 19-in) 8.3 in
TURNING CIRCLE	34.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	(w/ sunfr) 38.3 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.7 / 38.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	25.5 / 63.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3483 lb
TOW CAPACITY	na
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 13.2 gal
MPG	24/29/26 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	\$32,150
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	210
DESTINATION CHARGE	1335
TOTAL	\$33,695

Slight price increase; see below.

2024 HYUNDAI KONA LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
147-hp 2.0L Atkinson cycle 4-cyl, IVT (CVT)		
SE	\$24,250	\$25,750
SEL	25,600	27,100
190-hp 1.6L turbo GDI 4-cyl, 8-spd automatic		
N Line	30,800	32,300
Limited	31,800	33,300

2024 KONA ELECTRIC

	FWD
STANDARD RANGE : est 200 miles 48.6 kWh battery : 133 hp / 188 lb-ft	
SE	\$32,675
EXTENDED RANGE : est 261 miles 64.8 kWh battery : 201 hp / 188 lb-ft	
SEL	36,675
Limited	41,045