NEW STYLE, NEW STATS

BY JOE SAGE

It's surprising to realize that this is just generation two of the Kia Telluride, its first gen introduced in early 2019 as model year 2020, although that eclipsed it a bit in the disruptions of the pandemic and lockdown. Nonetheless, even in the absence of most of the usual media comparo events in that period, it promptly won a list of awards a hundred miles long. And nobody needs to tell you how many we all see in traffic every day.

With a similar lead time, the gen-two Telluride was introduced in early 2026 as model year 2027 (skipping model year 2026). With highly updated styling, plus other evolutions inside, outside and under the hood, the new one still appears to deliver value of arguably twice its price, as we had concluded with multiple drives of gen one.

The lineup is similar to gen one, with a little housekeeping, a few adjustments and nudges toward both the lower and upper ends. Driven here is an X-Pro SX-Prestige, the top, by price, of 12 versions across five trim levels, the top three offering a top-feature X-Line, then the top two also offering enhanced off-pavement X-Pro builds. All have the same engine and transmission, with an updated mix of FWD and AWD (see chart in sidebar).

Lineup-wide, the prior V6 has been replaced by a 2.5L turbo-4, with slightly lower horsepower and notably higher torque. Despite the downsized engine, fuel mileage hovers around the fairly thirsty 20 mark (17/22/19 mpg city/hwy/comb), though on the plus side, it does run on 87-octane regular.

Suspension varies only slightly across versions, with X-Pro's setup, including self-leveling rear suspension (as on many trims), good for its combination of performance, open highway and light dirt duty. Primarily, X-Pro earns its off-pavement credentials via smaller wheels with beefier sidewalls, and ground clearance increased to 9.1 inches, up considerably from 7.4 on all other versions.

A midsize with the personality of something bigger, gen two has grown a few inches longer, with legroom and cargo volume specs increased from the first generation.

Starting from a stop sign or red light, we sensed the briefest delay before power kicks in—not a lag, really, rather a growl with an illusion of grunt, more show than go for the first few nanoseconds, and then go go go. The new powertrain is then very quick, getting up to a healthy cruising speed extremely easily—so smoothly, you need to pay attention, with the overall feeling of its four-cylinder a more heroic experience of power and thrills than a six often feels when either is replacing an eight. It may be that element of surprise. But this is also a four in a spacious three-row SUV, smooth from the start, with fairly seamless shifts, and the growl quite satisfying as we get underway. The Telluride powertrain sounds and feels good.

We also went for a dirt run, starting in FWD on a primary unpaved stretch, by default, then popping into the combination of sand and 4WD for good measure. We did note some lurching on some of the more significant ruts and swales, unsure whether this may be due to the adaptive air suspension in our particular (not unusual) combination of conditions. A binnacle display showed our front wheels very active, but with all four at least somewhat active—probably worth seeking out another level of lockdown.

The beauty of Kia Telluride largely speaks for itself through its own massive success.

The beauty of X-Pro SX-Prestige is that you get full luxe features and details, along with off-road capabilities—meaning zero tradeoffs in making a choice, for many buyers. ■

STYLING: *Quite rectilinear at first glance, it's as though the styling studio created the basic form, then said, "it still needs somethin'." The box is broken up by low-key geometric sheet metal effects on the sides—larger triangular areas folding downward above all wheelwells, echoed by sharper folds angling upward from where wheelwellas meet rocker panel. The upper angles also point to rectangular black bits atop the wheel wells, which seem to emphasize the self-leveling suspension (on those that have it, which is most). These subtle complexities reveal themselves over time, which makes them all the more satisfying.*

FEATURES: *Our notes are more extensive than average, some topics in particular. Copious comments generally mean annoyances, but many are often subjective, many may fade or equalize over longer ownership time, and in fact, some are probably an absolute dream long-term, such as seat adjustments with far more possibilities than most, too many to perfect in a quick week. Nitpicky notes touched on the video rear mirror (some love, but we have a universal issue with); settings that were difficult purely because of location, tiny thin and/or gray-on-black fonts, signs of style first, over function.*

AND... *see our doors, locks and heat notes in sidebar.*

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	West Point, Georgia
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	SKorea / US
PARTS CONTENT	US/Can 50% / SKorea 35%
ENGINE	2.5L turbo-4, GDI dir inj, DOHC w multi-port inj manifold, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	274 hp / 311 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
TRANSMISSION	8-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	full-time AWD w Terrain Mode
SUSPENSION	(X-PRO): **F:** MacPherson strut, stblzr bar, high-perf dampers; **R:** multi-link & high-perf dampers; self-leveling rear suspension
STEERING	rack-mtd motor driven pwr
BRAKES	**F:** 345mm vented; **R:** 325mm vented
WHEELS	7.5x18 black finished alloys
TIRES	P255/60 R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	199.2 / 116.9 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(X-Pro) 9.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	39.0 ft
HEADRM (F/2/3)	(dual snrf) 40.0 / 38.9 / 37.4 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	41.4 / 43.0 / 32.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	22.3 / 48.7 / 89.3 cu.ft
WEIGHT	4729-4736 lb
TOW CAPACITY	5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg unl / 19.0 gal
MPG	17/22/19 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	**$56,790**
PAINT: Terrain Brown Matte	995
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	250
DESTINATION CHARGE	1545
TOTAL	**$59,580**

2027 KIA TELLURIDE LINEUP

All 2.5L turbo-4 / 8-spd auto	FWD	AWD
LX	$39,190	--
S	42,090	$44,090
EX	43,790	45,790
X-Line EX	--	47,290
SX	48,790	--
X-Line SX	--	51,790
X-Pro SX	--	53,690
SX-Prestige	--	53,890
X-Line SX-Prestige	--	54,890
X-Pro SX-Prestige	--	▼ 56,790

2027 KIA TELLURIDE HEV

Treated as basically a separate model in the Kia lineup is a Telluride HEV (hybrid), with higher power, notably higher fuel mileage, higher purchase price, and fewer trim levels, including no X-Pro. We will be driving this in an upcoming issue.

DOORS-LOCKS-HEAT? *As with a surprising number of vehicles this summer, we had repeated problems with the door handles and especially the locks—touch- and electronic-dependent, very possibly suffering from the heat, which, if so, could make it an issue of particular note in our climate.*

Needing further investigation (was it a one-off? still not good), at our first red light, the whole system had shut down completely. No air. Everything lit up. But nothing. Instant oven, with an outside summer temp of 104º. Add to our wondering about hot-weather-testing lately.