

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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KIA TAKES OFF!

The new Kia Rondo rounds out an increasingly complete vehicle lineup. Accolades pour in for quality, safety, value and owner satisfaction. And www.kiamatch.com will put you in touch with the right Kia for you.



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- The new Ford Taurus and Taurus X • Buick Riviera concept from Shanghai
- Russo and Steele Monterey • Scottsdale auction land challenge
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DEFYING CATEGORIZATION AND EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

By Barbara & Bill Schaffer



It seems like we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to categorize some of the latest vehicle offerings. Our most recent labeling exercise was for the Rondo, which Kia officials labeled a crossover and we agree. (We've also heard it called a small minivan, wagon and five-door hatchback.)

It doesn't matter what it's called. The Kia Rondo is an excellent example of the passion and pride Kia is building into its vehicles. Rondo heritage dates back through two generations of the European Caren as it enters the North America market for the first time. The European design influence is obvious with the smooth exterior lines, high stance, sloped back "D" pillar and wagon styling.

Available in five- or seven-passenger configurations, we were amazed at the roomy interior, wide door openings, headroom and legroom (especially in the first two rows; the third row is more for an occasional adult or smaller children).

The inside has an abundance of convenient storage compartments and drink holders. Seats in both the five- and seven-passenger versions are split (60/40 in the second row and 50/50 in the third row) to easily tailor cargo capacity and shape to various flat surfaces.

Cargo space is limited to 6.5 cubic feet when all three rows are in place, but with the third row flat, there are 31.7 cubic feet of space for cargo. There is a compartment in the cargo area for the jack and tools. If those are removed, the compartment can be used to ice a few beverages.

Rondo comes in two trim levels and with two front-wheel-drive engine choices. A 2.4-liter, 162-horsepower four-

cylinder provides a comfortable level of performance to both the LX and EX models through a four-speed automatic transmission. An optional 2.7-liter, 182-hp V-6 engine with five-speed automatic transmission is available in both models.

Rondo pricing starts at \$16,995, including destination charge for the four-cylinder LX and goes to \$20,795 for the V-6 EX. Leather, convenience and premium packages add nearly \$4,000.

Ian Beavis, Kia Vice President of Marketing, said the Rondo is not being marketed to a particular demographic group; rather it is for a mindset, which he described as "Rondoism."

Price and target audience aside, Kia planners have taken no shortcuts on this vehicle. The Rondo uses quality materials in a well-designed and executed application to create the feeling of a much more substantial vehicle than we would normally expect at this price point.

On the road, the Rondo is exceptionally quiet and solid with little road noise. The ride is smooth and controlled with the feeling of a larger vehicle. Both engines provide spirited performance with respectable acceleration and passing power. The extra 20 horsepower of the V-6 makes a notable difference in power for a small fuel economy penalty. The four-cylinder engine gets a 21 mpg city EPA fuel economy rating and 29 mpg on the highway, while the V-6 gets a 20/27 mpg rating.

As the twelfth vehicle in the Kia North American portfolio, the Rondo is not only attracting the attention of a growing number of satisfied Kia buyers, but has to be raising some concerns for other automakers—foreign and domestic. ■

KIA DESIGN AWARD

Kia Chief Design Officer Honored by Royal College of Art Joins Pininfarina and Giugiaro

Kia Motors Chief Design Officer Peter Schreyer has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the Royal College of Art (RCA) in recognition of his contribution to automotive design. Schreyer, who most recently debuted the Kia ex_cee'd cabrio concept car at the Geneva Motor Show earlier this year and has been charged with establishing Kia's future design direction, is only the third automotive designer to be honored by the RCA since their establishment in 1967, joining fellow automotive designers Sergio Pininfarina and Giorgetto Giugiaro.

"(Kia has) given me the opportunity to shape its whole brand design and character, and seldom does a designer have such a clean sheet to work with," stated Schreyer. We have (shown) just where we might go, and I think we will surprise the entire automotive world with what we are planning for Kia's future."

Schreyer, 53, studied Industrial Design at the Fachhochschule (University of Applied Science) in Munich. He studied at the Royal College of Art in 1979-1980 under an Audi scholarship, then worked at Audi and Volkswagen, producing designs for vehicles such as the Audi TT and the VW New Beetle. He joined Kia as Chief Design Officer in 2006. ■

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*Warranty is a limited powertrain warranty. For details, see retailer or go to kia.com. †Based on comparison of 2006 and available 2007 models. **2007 EPA fuel-efficiency estimates are 21 MPG/city and 29 MPG/hwy for 4-cylinder. Actual mileage may vary. ‡Available. *MSRP includes freight; excludes taxes, title, license, options and retailer charges. EX model shown with optional features, which cost extra. Actual prices set by retailer.