

Ten

BY
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SAGE

The midsize sedan segment remains the biggest in the US marketplace (although compact crossovers are now right on its heels). There are a lot of reasons for this—purchase and operating economies, balance of capacity and function to everyday parking and handling, and so on—and the market has responded in kind, with a great many very solid and attractive choices.

Nothing and nobody is perfect, so our headline may be partly tongue in cheek, but Kia does have its 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty as a tie-breaker (as does its cousin, Hyundai). Kia overall also has proven itself statistically, now ranking number two in the JD Power Initial Quality Survey (only Porsche beats it) and number one in the 2016 AutoPacific Vehicle Satisfaction Awards. Kia is one of just two brands to have two winners (Optima and Soul) on the latest *Parents* magazine and Edmunds.com 10 Best Family Cars of 2016 list. Optima has been Kia's top-selling vehicle for three years running and is their first vehicle to sell over 150,000 units in a year.

With these accolades, it would be remiss not

to have Optima on your list in this segment.

Our 2016 Kia Optima SX Turbo is the next-to-top model in a lineup with MSRP from \$22,140 to \$36,040, from LX and EX to SX and SX Limited.

LX and EX variously offer 2.4L naturally aspirated or 1.6L turbo, achieving as much as 39 MPG highway. SX and SXL (a.k.a. SX Limited) have a potent 245-hp 2.0L turbo and extensive features (our car is 370 pounds heavier than the 39-MPG model), yet are still rated at 32 MPG highway.

With a starting price under \$30 grand, this SX may hit the sweetest spot in the lineup. Ours ratcheted up with one comprehensive package (see sidebar), which gives you arguably everything you might shop a German premium sedan for (at two or three times the price), but all for \$4800 well spent. In fact, with this package, our SX is pretty indistinguishable from the top-dollar SXL.

The lineup will also add an all-new 2017 Optima Hybrid and Kia's first PHEV, the 2017 Optima Plug-in Hybrid, both revealed at the Chicago show this winter and on sale later this year. (The 2016 Optima Hybrid available now is based on the prior-generation 2015 Optima.)

Our week of routine driving in the Optima was as transparently blissful as anticipated, benefiting from its ratio of turbo power to advanced light weight, its well-executed electric rack-and-pinion steering, potent brakes and advanced suspension, as well as a spacious cabin laden with technology, style, features and a favorite of ours,

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L 4-cyl DOHC turbo
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HP/TORQUE	245 hp / 260 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	6-spd automatic
BRAKES	hydraulic vacuum power-assist
	FR: 12.6 vent; R: 11.2 solid disc
STEERING	rack and pinion elec (R-MDPS)
SUSPENSION	FR: indep MacPherson strut,
	coil springs, anti-roll bar;
	R: indep multi-link coil springs, anti-roll bar
WHEELS / SPARE	7.5J x 18 alloy / temp spare
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	191.1 in / 110.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.8 ft
WEIGHT	3594 lb
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	87 octane reg / 18.5 gal
MPG	22/32/25 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE **\$29,690**

SXT PREMIUM TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE: HID headlights w/high-beam assist, panoramic sunroof, Harman Kardon QLS premium surround sound, front passenger power seat w/lumbar, heat/vent front seats, heated outboard rear seat cushions, front collision warning, blind spot, rear cross traffic, rear park assist, lane departure warning, autonomous emergency braking, adv smart cruise, surround view, LED o'head interior lighting .4800

DESTINATION CHARGE: 825

TOTAL \$35,315

top-notch Harman Kardon premium audio.

We drove this new car at its launch last fall, in the Colorado high country. At the time, we noted that Kia does not try to present Optima as a "3-killer" (as so many do, with BMW in their sights). But, as noted then, they really could. ■

