

Kia hits the accelerator pedal

Kia continually expands and recalibrates, periodically introducing a complete game changer. The new Stinger—a reinvention of the classic Grand Tourer—marks their move into performance. BY JOE SAGE

Ernest Hemingway was reportedly asked how he had managed to lose all his fortune. “Two ways,” he responded. “Gradually. And suddenly.”

Kia has become a giant of the automotive landscape in much the same two ways. With an eye on continuous improvement and a finger on the pulse of the huge American market, the company has consistently upped its quality, style and content—to the point that it has become Number One in the prestigious JD Power Initial Quality Study for all brands the past two years and number one among non-premium brands for three (yet still gives you the same 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain they introduced in long-ago confidence-building years).

They have also made the occasional quantum leap. One milestone was the big boost the brand received after inventing the Kia Soul from a blank sheet of paper in 2009 (creating a wave of success they still refer to internally as “After Soul”). So successful has this vehicle been—aimed at a particular niche, but conquering any number of categories

that recognized the breadth, spunk and utility Soul offers—that it gave the company a new position in the automotive marketplace not just as a mainstream player, but one with particular appeal as a styling and engineering innovator.

And now—enter the Kia Stinger. Having conquered value, quality, style and content, Kia evokes the classic Grand Tourers of the 1970s—famous for glamorous and potent cruises from across Europe to the Mediterranean coast—delivering a distinctly performance-oriented four-door sport coupe, five-door hatchback, high-horsepower, low-silhouette, luggage-gobbling canyon carver and distance cruiser, all in one.

Styling is perfect for the mission. Content is perfect for the mission. And the ratio of performance to value will knock most anyone’s socks off.

It’s not as though they whipped up this car out of thin air, overnight. The Kia Stinger is the result of six years’ diligent and highly inspired work, spinning off the GT Concept shown at Frankfurt in 2011, a car that generated a chorus of, “Ya gotta build it!” says Orth Hedrick, Kia’s VP of product planning.

It’s universal for the developers of a new model to have specific goals and benchmarks. The most daring machines can have challenging, impressive, even startling, benchmarks.

Six years ago, would you have expected Kia to be benchmarking the Porsche Panamera for their next vehicle, in everything but price? How about the Audi A5, S5 and A7 Sportbacks, BMW 4 Series and 6 Series Gran Coupes, Infiniti Q50, Lexus GS, and the Mercedes-Benz CLS Class? The Stinger team set out to approach, meet and beat a range of specifications and intangibles in each of the above.

As the phrase goes, mission accomplished. Kia Stinger beats all in horsepower and torque, all but one in zero-to-60 acceleration (and is only two-tenths of a second off that one), and all at top speed. It beats all in rear legroom, all but one in front legroom and all but one in cargo volume.

And it beats them all in price. By a lot. (By up to 54 percent in the case of the Panamera.)

All while getting up to 25 mpg highway in either rear- or all-wheel-drive (this is Kia’s only rear-drive vehicle in the US other than the low-volume K900).

There are two engines available (a four and a six)—either engine with either drivetrain. All have

an eight-speed automatic transmission (geared a bit lower in the twin-turbo V6) with multiple drive modes including Custom, Eco, Sport, Comfort and Smart (Smart applies attributes of Eco, Sport and Comfort suited to your driving style, while Custom lets you create your own combination).

We joined Kia in North Hollywood, California to give the car a good workout. We flew from Phoenix to Bob Hope Airport, Burbank (one of five major metro LA airports)—our first time doing so, and we’re hooked. An unassuming airport built in the 1930s, it features a dramatic descent along the Santa Monica Mountains on the back side of the Hollywood Hills and still boasts stairs instead of jetways. The airport was renamed in honor of beloved local resident and entertainment great Bob Hope in 2003, the year he passed away at age 100 (also the 100th anniversary of the Wright Brothers’ first flight in 1903, the year Hope was born).

In line with the ‘70s classic Grand Tourer theme, Kia located a North Hollywood facility for our presentations, complete with its own movie theater—with ‘70s classics from *Star Wars* to Monty Python available in our off-hours—and arcade games such as Centipede. We’ve noted before that a ‘70s game machine put as much technology as the entire Apollo moon mission at your fingertips for 25 cents. Similarly, the 2018 Kia Stinger puts as much technology as an upcoming Mars mission at your fingertips from the lower \$30s to the upper \$40s.

Included on all models are a color touchscreen,

Android/Apple connectivity, rear camera, Bluetooth, SiriusXM, keyless entry and start, dual zone auto climate, second row vents, auto-dim mirror, front and rear parking sensors, electronic stability control and traction control. Additional features are added with each step up the model lineup (see sidebar). Even the advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) package included on the top of the line GT2—with blind spot detection, rain sensing wipers, forward collision avoidance and warning, lane keep assist, lane departure warning, driver attention warning and high beam assist—is available for just \$2000 on any other model.

Kia Stinger develops a lot of power against relatively light weight and derives its downforce from its elegant and sporty body form—no need for tacking on a mechanical spoiler as many others do.

Stinger 2.0T four-cylinder turbo models are outfitted with 18-inch all-season performance tires, and 3.3T twin-turbo V6 models come with long-life 19-inch Michelin Pilot Sport 4 ultra-high-performance tires, engineered specifically for the Stinger GT and staggered for more meat in the rear.

“On paper, this car has the chops,” says Hedrick. “When you get on the road, you’ll see it delivers.”

We had V6 (Stinger GT) models in both RWD and AWD for the day. From North Hollywood, we were out of town and into the hills very quickly.

The Angeles Crest Highway—California Hwy 2

KEEP RIGHT >>



SPECIFICATIONS

STINGER 2.0T, 2.0T PREMIUM

ENGINE	.....2.0L twin scroll turbo 16v 4-cyl
HP/TORQUE	.....255 hp / 260 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD, AWD
TRANSMISSION	.....8-speed automatic
STEERING	.....rack & pinion / elec / constant
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson, R: Multi Link; gas shocks;
BRAKES	.....F: 12.6 single-piston vented disc, R: 12.4 single-piston solid disc;
WHEELS	.....F/R: 8.0Jx18 alloy
TIRES	.....F/R: P225/45R18
WEIGHT	.....RWD 3611 lb; AWD 3792 lb
ACCEL 0-TO-60	.....5.9 sec
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	.....prem rec / 15.9 gal
MPG	.....RWD 22/29/25 (city/hwy/comb) AWD 21/29/24 (city/hwy/comb)

3.3T GT, 3.3T GT1, 3.3T GT2

ENGINE	.....3.3L twin turbo 24v V6
HP/TORQUE	.....365 hp / 376 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....RWD, AWD
TRANSMISSION	.....8-speed automatic
STEERING	.....rack & pinion / elec / variable
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson, R: Multi Link; gas or electric shocks
BRAKES	.....F: Brembo 4-piston 13.8 vented disc, R: Brembo 2-piston 13.4 vented disc
WHEELS	.....F: 8.0Jx19; R: 8.5Jx19
TIRES	.....F: P225/40R19; R: P255/35R19 (optional for AWD: 8.0Jx18, P225/45R18)
WEIGHT	.....RWD 3829 lb; AWD 4023 lb
ACCEL 0-TO-60	.....4.7 sec
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	.....prem rec / 15.9 gal
MPG	.....RWD 19/25/21 (city/hwy/comb) AWD 19/25/21 (city/hwy/comb)

LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....190.2 / 114.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....23.3 cu.ft / 40.9 cu.ft

BASE PRICES:

STINGER 2.0T RWD	.....\$31,900
STINGER 2.0T PREMIUM RWD	.....37,100
STINGER GT 3.3T RWD	.....38,350
STINGER GT1 3.3T RWD	.....43,250
STINGER GT2 3.3T RWD (W/ADAS)	.....49,200
+ AWD (ANY MODEL)	.....+2,200

STINGER 2.0T INCLUDES: Drive Mode Select, leather trim interior, 60/40-split rear seats, heated front seats, leather-wrapped wheel, 8-way pwr driver seat, 6-way pwr psngr seat, 7-in color touchscreen, Android/Apple, rear camera, Bluetooth, SiriusXM, auto-dim rear mirror, smart key w pushbutton start, dual zone auto climate w 2nd row vents, front/rear parking sensors, ESC & traction control, acoustic laminated glass, temp spare, mech parking brake (electronic opt), floor mats.

STINGER GT 3.3T INCLUDES: Same as 2.0T plus Brembo hi-po brakes, flat-bottom leather-wrapped wheel, Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tires, aluminum interior trim, LED headlights, electronic parking brake standard.

2.0T PREMIUM or GT1 3.3T ADDS: sunroof, 8-in touchscreen w/nav, Harman Kardon 720-watt 15-speaker premium audio; 7-in LCD instrument cluster, driver’s seat memory, power tilt/telescope wheel, garage door opener.

GT2 3.3T ADDS: dynamic bending headlights, limited slip differential, paddle shifters; shift-by-wire, Nappa leather trim, power driver seat thigh support, power driver seat air cell lumbar support w/power side bolsters, power passenger lumbar support, heads-up display, smart power trunk, ADAS package (see below).

ADAS PACKAGE: Included on GT2; optional on others. Includes blind spot detection, rain sensing wipers, forward collision avoidance & warning, lane keep assist, lane departure warning, driver attention warning, high beam assist.....2000

DESTINATION: (estimated).....900

—is a two-lane twister from the edge of greater LA to the edge of the Mojave Desert, hitting almost 8000 feet in altitude, with nonstop curves, climbs, even a few hairpins. It's a road only the most confident would choose to show off a new performance machine, and Kia chose well for the Stinger.

We had dry conditions, and both the all-wheel and rear-drive Stingers powered through the turns and devoured every mile with aggressive confidence. With the driver assistance technologies, either drivetrain can handle the wet or snow, though regular winter drivers will surely appreciate the AWD version (\$2200 more on any model).

Our autocross was set up in parking lots at Six Flags Magic Mountain amusement park, which by its proximity to Hollywood has been used in dozens of movies and TV shows—famously as Wallyworld in *National Lampoon's Vacation*. (It was closed for our day—“moose out front shoulda told you!”)

Autocross gave us a chance to really nail the powertrain, handling and braking of both the rear- and all-wheel-drive Stinger—and a chance to run the same course in the competition. On hand were the reference machines from Audi, BMW, Infiniti, Lexus, Mercedes-Benz and Porsche, so we could hammer them all and compare—such is Kia's confidence in their build. We had our antennae out a mile, to try to quantify meaningful differences. Did a double-price car have an edge? If so, could it be just a couple of pounds' tire pressure variance during an aggressive session on a warm day? We had

to laugh as we realized how close they were and how deep we were digging. Kia themselves say, “we don't realistically expect a Porsche guy to come in and say, ‘oh, here's a great alternative’” (although we suspect some might). Realistically? Performance in the Kia Stinger is top-notch.

The Stinger interior is also inspired by premium Euro-cruising Grand Touring classics, but with modern quality, materials and engineering. Leather is included on every Stinger—Nappa leather with contrast piping on higher models. Instrumentation and creature comforts are clean and purposeful. The overall instrument panel form evokes an aircraft wing, appropriate to the fighter jet jock experience behind the wheel.

A telltale element of a truly successful game-changer is that you may immediately forget the game was changed—perceptions adapt quickly. Kia Stinger fits its development goals like a glove, and from birth, it fits the Kia brand. One taste and you'll know Kia does performance and soon think they always have. Kia engineers and product planners have a great deal to be proud of, all the more so as achieved within a Kia value structure. “Some dreams really do come true,” says Hedrick. And remember: this is just their *first* performance car.

Do we like the Kia Stinger? It has become kind of a rhetorical cottage industry among our staff to see whether anyone anywhere does not. We doubt it.

And the name: Stinger! How was this even still available?! It's perfect. ■

KIA STINGER AT SEMA

DRIFTING AND HIGH PERFORMANCE

Kia turned a Las Vegas Convention Center parking lot into a performance center during the SEMA Show: a drifting course where showgoers could ride along with professional Formula Drift drivers as they slid special



Stinger GTs effortlessly through the corners at up to 50 mph—even two-time Formula One and Indianapolis 500 champion Emerson Fittipaldi enjoyed his first drifting experience here—and a high performance test track, where they could launch a Stinger GT from 0 to 60 mph, rush to a full stop with its high performance Brembo brakes, then push it through a challenging autocross.

SPECIAL KIA STINGER GT WIDE BODY

West Coast Customs built a custom Stinger GT Wide Body for SEMA, in pearl blue metallic paint. Inspired by racing GT cars of the 1970s, it has wide fenders, 21-inch Keen forged wheels, high-performance tires, lowered suspension, a carbon fiber aero kit, rear diffuser and quadport exhaust. Inside are leather seats with custom blue piping, handstitched gray leather dash, gloss black console trim and alcantara-wrapped wheel.



STINGER GT FEDERATION

In custom creamy orange paint, the Stinger GT Federation is modified with parts and accessories from leading aftermarket suppliers, available for purchase with the vehicle launch—body accent kit by Air Design USA with rear spoiler, rear diffuser and redesigned hood vents; K&N cold air intake and low restriction quad-tipped Borla exhaust for an additional 15 hp (380); Eibach springs; thicker anti-roll bars; reduced ride height; staggered 20-inch TSW wheels and Falken tires. ■

