

Power play

BY JOE SAGE

The overall Kia crossover-SUV lineup has a lot of variety, including typical one-two-three-size models, plus the always-its-own-thing Soul and now, for the past couple of years, Kia Niro.

The original Kia Niro in 2017 was a hybrid only, thus it didn't bother saying so in its name. Niro's hybrid drivetrain delivers a kick well beyond its stated horsepower or clock times. Its ample volume sits atop well-developed suspension and body geometry that belie any bulk or front-drive characteristics, hugging the road through curves and parking like a compact. Now, PHEV (plug-in hybrid) and EV (pure electric) versions have been added.

The vehicle at hand is (a) the Kia Niro, with its style, performance and utility; and (b) a full EV.

Our first EV for review—eight long years ago—was so new, range so short and charging infrastructure so sparse, it was sent for just three days (and delivered on a flatbed truck). Now, EVs arrive under their own power and stay for a full week, as with most, and operations are fairly routine.

We have a couple of charging accounts and, bit by bit with our sporadic usage, are getting a handle on locations along our normal paths, which are maturing dramatically. We've even mapped out chargers for what-if road trips—San Diego, Utah, West Texas—most quite doable, though we've yet to do them. In the early days, most people would either use 120V home current, which everybody has but is slow, or 220V, which most everybody has and which takes one simple visit from an elec-

trician to install an EV charging base. Now, the committed EV owner (and is there any other kind?) will want a DC fast charging unit in their garage, as relying on the paid network can get pricey.

The hybrid Kia Niro starts at \$23,490 and runs across five trims up to \$32,250, all with the same 1.6L gasoline engine plus high-torque electric motor, for a combined 139 hp and 195 lb-ft of torque, with fuel mileage as high as 52/49/50 (c/h/c) in the slimmest trim to 46/40/43 in S Touring or Touring.

Niro PHEV, added in 2018, runs from \$28,500 to \$35,200 across three trims, has higher voltage and horsepower from its electric component yet the same system totals, with fuel mileage in the middle of the hybrid range, 48/44/46 across the board.

Niro EV, introduced later in 2018 as a 2019—the one driven here—has two trims: EX at \$38,500 or our EX Premium sample at \$44,000. Horsepower and torque (201/295) are considerably higher than either hybrid, while "energy efficiency" (MPGe) is, well, stated differently and—its own huge topic—is difficult, at best, to compare. For us, it was typically \$17-18 to load 120-130 miles of range, a cost on par with a 20-mpg vehicle.

The EV version provides the most zip but requires the most attention to logistics. The PHEV is a best-of-both-worlds solution if you have a bit more budget and a real intent to plug in when you can. The basic hybrid is a great solution for most.

Most reviewers don't have an installed charger, often making range a bigger topic than it needs to be. Many owners can rely on public chargers, topping off during work and errands, but most will definitely want their own fast-charge at home. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

MOTOR	356V permanent magnet AC synchronous
BATTERY	64kWh lithium ion polymer (LIPO) 356V 180 Ah; energy 180 kWh, power 170 kW
CHARGING	7.12 kW on-board charger (OBC); DC fast charge 80%: 50 kW 1 hr 15 min; 100 kW 1 hr; Level 1: 120v 59 hrs; Level 2: 9 hrs 35 min
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HP/TORQUE	201 hp / 291 lb-ft (150 kW / 395 Nm)
TRANSMISSION	gear reduction unit
0-TO-62 / TOP SPEED	7.8 sec / 103.8 mph
SUSPENSION	twin-tube shocks; F: MacPherson type; R: multi-link
STEERING	motor-driven power steering
BRAKES ..	electric booster regen, motor polarity reversal; F: 12.0 vented / R: 11.8 solid braking distance 62-to-0 137 ft
WHEELS / TIRES	7.0Jx17 alloy / P215/55R17
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	172.2 / 106.3 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	6.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	34.8 ft
APPROACH / DEPARTURE	16.6 / 29.0°
HEADROOM (F/R)	40.1 / 37.7 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.7 / 36.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	18.5 / 53.0 cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	not recommended
WEIGHT	4916 lb (battery 1008 lb)
ALL-ELECTRIC RANGE	239 miles
MPGe	123/102/112 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$44,000
COLD WEATHER PKG 2.0: battery heater, heat pump ...	1080
DELETION PKG: delete Homelink & ventilated seats ...	(200)
EX PREMIUM LAUNCH EDITION: heated steering wheel, LED headlights, auto-dim mirror, fwd & rev park distance warning, cargo cover	1000
OPTIONS: cargo mat (95), carpeted floor mats (135), cargo net (50)	280
DESTINATION CHARGE	995

TOTAL

KIA NIRO LINEUP (2019)

Niro (hybrid)	\$23,490
Niro Plug-In Hybrid	28,500
Niro EV (base EX trim)	38,500

EX PREMIUM INCLUDES: power sunroof w sunshade, heated-ventilated leather front seats, power driver's seat w power lumbar, Harman Kardon premium audio w subwoofer, 8" touchscreen nav, wireless phone charging, console mood lighting, reverse park distance warning, LED interior lamps, LED taillamps, driver side seatback pocket, deluxe scuff plates.

