

Popular for being popular?

Being famous for being famous started with the Kardashians, while being popular for being popular probably starts in grade school. Kia Telluride certainly wins a lot of awards. And this seems to lead to it being very popular. Or might it be the other way around?

Kia Telluride feels quite familiar by now, though it's actually quite new, introduced in spring 2019 as a 2020 model, with 2021 just its second model year (and with 2020 as the year that never was).

Right out of the gate and continuing through two calendar and model years, Telluride has taken top

trophies in a wide range of regional and market segment media comparo events, both off-road and on (several of which we drive and vote in, though we never say how we vote). It has been crowned SUV of the Year (sometimes CUV) or a Top 10 pick from pretty much all the major national magazines, comparative resource sites and several additional awards groups, and has bagged a range of awards for specific attributes (partial list at lower right).

If you've ever had someone take you to a movie, vacation spot, restaurant or anything else, saying this is the best ever and they can't wait to see how

you respond, you know the expectations game can boost your enthusiasm or it can disappoint. Despite our prior brief comparo drives, that was our starting point when we finally got our hands on this highly acclaimed vehicle for a full week.

We had no standout memories from our comparos, but were very aware of how high everybody else's expectations for this vehicle seem to be.

Telluride does do the things it wins awards for. But this is a segment full of serious competition—in everything from function to form to style to quality to value. Telluride hits the marks, but does it do them all best? Or somehow uniquely? We inescapably puzzled over this during our week.

Driven here is the top SX trim with all-wheel drive. (All trims have the same 291-hp 3.8-liter V6 and offer AWD.) The interior feels mainstream as a whole, while finishes are a cut above average.

The main differentiator of Telluride is its three rows (seating seven or eight, depending upon trim level), ample for a nominal though generous mid-size. Not some squeezed-in add-on, interior space is well engineered from concept to execution. Legroom is exceptionally plentiful in the second row and well above many in the third, with easy access. As for the SUV paradox of seats for most of the soccer team using up the space needed for their gear, even with all seats up, its 21-cu.ft cargo volume rivals a full-size sedan's trunk and will hold many soccer balls, uniforms and water bottles.

We noted solid acceleration and power, smooth lane changes, nice handling and tight turning, especially for a three-row, though we experienced noticeable lag through 90-degree surface street turns, which improves in sport mode.

Features that irritated us were fewer than average—the drive mode dial, for instance, could use stronger detents, wider spacing and clearer labeling in glare situations. Features that delight include its side blind spot cameras when signaling a lane change or turn. The Harman Kardon audio, as usual, provides great sound at notable value.

All in all, everything it does, it does well, but again—it is certainly not alone in this measure. We can see how people who've already heard or read its praises could settle their search with their first drive, though we spent our week comparing it with many other vehicles we're very familiar with, all of which offer quite a bit themselves.

As a pretty solid indicator that things can indeed be popular for being popular, our social media posts of the Kia Telluride drew larger than average responses, including from people who didn't already follow us, indicating that they have it keyworded. This in itself seemed to indicate that its reputation for popularity precedes it. ■



KIA TELLURIDE AWARDS SAMPLER

- ALG Design Innovation Award: Overall Design and Execution
- Autotrader: Best 3-Row SUV, Best Interior Under \$50,000
- Car and Driver: Editors' Choice Award, 10Best Award
- Car Connection: Best Family Car to Buy
- Edmunds: Top Rated SUV
- Hispanic Motor Press Foundation: SUV of the Year
- JD Power: APEAL Award: Upper Midsize SUV
- Kelley Blue Book: Best New Model, Best 3-Row Midsize SUV, Best Resale Value
- New England Motor Press Assn (NEMPA): Winter SUV of the Year
- Midwest Automotive Media Assn (MAMA): Family Vehicle of the Year
- Motor Trend: SUV of the Year
- Motorweek; Driver's Choice Best Large Utility
- North American Car of the Year (NACTOY): Utility Vehicle of the Year
- Northwest Automotive Press Assn (NWAPA): Best Mid- and Full-size Family Utility; and Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year runner-up
- Rebelle Rally: 2nd Overall in X-Cross Class
- Texas AutoWriters Assn (TAWA): CUV of Texas (top title trophy); and Best Midsize CUV (Auto Roundup)
- Texas AutoWriters Assn (TAWA): SUV of Texas (top title trophy); and Best Midsize SUV (Truck Rodeo)
- Texas Motor Press Assn (TxMPA): Best SUV
- US News & World Report: Best 3-Row SUV for Families, Kia Best SUV Brand
- Wards: 10 Best Interiors Award
- What Car: Large SUV of the Year, World Car of the Year Award

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	KMMG, West Point, Georgia
CONSTRUCTION.....	iso-structure steel unibody
SEATING.....	(SX) seven / three rows
ENGINE.....	3.8L GDI alum/alum Lambda-II DOHC w dual CVT V6
HP/TORQUE.....	291 hp / 262 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN.....	active on-demand AWD
TRANSMISSION.....	8-spd automatic
SUSPENSION.....	F: indep MacPherson struts, coils, stblzr bar; R: indep multi-link, stblzr bar
STEERING.....	column-mtd motor-drive pwr
BRAKES.....	dual-diagonal, split circuit; F: 13.4 vented; R: 12.0 solid
WHEELS / TIRES.....	7.5x20 alloy / 245/50 R20
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	196.9 / 114.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	38.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/2/3).....	39.5 / 38.8 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3).....	41.4 / 42.4 / 31.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	21.0 / 46.0 / 87.0 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	8.0 in
APPROACH / DEPART.....	17.0 / 20.0°
TOW CAPACITY.....	5000 lb
WEIGHT.....	4354-4482 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY.....	.87 oct reg / 18.8 gal
MPG.....	19/24/21 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE.....	\$44,090
INCL (SX AWD): 20" black alloy wheels, LED headlamps & fogs, fixed-glass rear sunroof, 2nd row captain's chairs, 12-way power driver's seat w memory (& mirror memory), Harman Kardon surround sound audio, surround view & blind-spot view monitor, fwd park distance warning, HomeLink.....	incl
SX PRESTIGE PKG (beyond SX trim level): 110V inverter, heads-up display, Nappa leather seat trim, premium cloth headliner & visors, heated/ventilated 2nd row seats, rain-sense front wipers.....	2300
TOWING PKG: hitch, self-level rear susp.....	795
CARPETED FLOOR MATS.....	210
CARGO COVER.....	155
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1170
TOTAL.....	\$48,720

Pricing above is per our vehicle's sticker. Latest manufacturer stated pricing is:

2021 KIA TELLURIDE LINEUP

LX.....	8-passenger	
.....fwd.....		\$32,190
.....AWD.....		34,190
EX.....	8-psngr (7p opt)	
.....fwd.....		\$37,590
.....AWD.....		39,590
S.....	7-passenger	
.....fwd.....		\$34,590
.....AWD.....		36,590
SX.....	7-passenger	
.....fwd.....		42,490
.....AWD.....		44,390
DESTINATION CHARGE.....		1170