

Generations

BY JOE SAGE

It's unusual to receive a 2020 model in late 2021, but a quick check reveals the Kia Sportage is unchanged for 2021 and in fact 2022 (these each offer special packages). The 2020 was a refresh revealed at the Chicago Auto Show in early 2020 (the last event we flew to before pandemic lockdowns). Research showed a very different styling refresh in Europe for 2021 and another very different one for China. What might be in store for us? That question was answered just before this issue went live (see sidebar). But for now, all observations of this 2020 model remain current.

Kia Sportage has been with us since 1993, with the shorter of two versions sitting on just a 92.9-inch wheelbase (smaller than the newer little Kia Seltos). In line with industry trends, Sportage today is within an inch or two of the bigger Sorento

when it was new in 2002. Though still notably small when launched in 2015, the same Sportage today is now in a solid position among the most popular segment of all, compact crossovers. And its styling, dramatically different at launch, is now—by familiarity, industry evolution, or a bit of both—quite mainstream, if still satisfyingly edgy.

All of this adds up to a vehicle with size, style and function that are more current than ever.

The user interface is easy and effective (we used the steering wheel controls and binnacle display more than the big screen). Best of all, controls include knobs and hard switches for climate and infotainment, far less distracting, as you can do more by blind touch than via a touchscreen when driving. If we found something we wanted to turn off, we'd generally instead find a setting that mitigated it, even better than sacrificing a function (with occasional exceptions—we always envision interesting testing and engineering discussions). Although SX is the top trim, there are a few unex-

pected shortcomings, such as a one-touch driver's window but not passenger. We're always happy to see inclusion of Harman Kardon premium audio, in this case a 320-watt system with eight speakers and subwoofer plus CLARI-FI technology—optional on EX, standard on top-trim SX, replacing a 160-watt six-speaker system on the lower two trims. Sportage SX also includes cooled seats, until recently only found on top-dollar vehicles.

SX is the only trim which replaces the base 181-hp 2.4L four-cylinder with a 240-hp 2.0L turbo. All have a six-speed automatic (unspecified but presumably the same). We'd recommend the SX for its engine, if possible, though we'd love to see an ungraded transmission with it—the powertrain's weak point was often revealed with a dip and a surge at that critical point of making a surface street turn and accelerating.

We've had plenty of time to get used to the styling that seemed odd at birth, helped along by our sample's soft, rich Pacific Blue, which turns es-



pecially magical at dawn and dusk, showing off its shapely bodywork and enhancing its stance atop the 19-inch wheels exclusive to SX. Color does make a difference and in this case helped win us over to the vehicle overall in a pretty big way. An interesting angle on this is that as soon as the 2023 hits the roads, this and the prior generation, which we had still preferred for awhile, will both be on a level playing field worth a revisit.

For now, there's plenty of time to get your hands on this instant classic, through 2022. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Gwangju, South Korea
ENGINE	.....2.0L GDI turbo 16v DOHC
HP/TORQUE	.....240 hp / 260 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....10.0:1
DRIVETRAIN	.....(FWD standard) AWD
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd automatic
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut; R: multi-link; gas shocks
STEERING	.....motor pwr-assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 12.6x1.1; R: 11.9x0.4
WHEELS / TIRES	.....7.5Jx19 alloy / P245/45 R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....176.4 / 105.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....(FWD 6.4) AWD 6.8 in
APPR/DEP/BRKOVER (AWD)	.....28.0 / 24.6 / 19.5°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....34.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w snrf) 37.6 / 37.9 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.5 / 38.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....30.7 / 60.1 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3765-3997 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....(wo/w brakes) 1653 / 2000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg 87 octane / 16.4 gal
MPG	.....19/24/21 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (2020).....\$35,090

SX AWD ADDS: 2.0L turbo engine, 19" alloys, smart cruise w stop/go, electronic parking brake, front/rear park assist, keyless entry/start & smart welcome, pano sunroof w rails, 8" touchscreen w nav, UVO link (incl trial), color meter cluster, Harman-Kardon premium audio, leather, power, heated/vented front seats, heated steering wheel, wireless phone charge, dual-zone auto climate, auto-dim mirror w HomeLink, LED heads, fogs, tails, hands-free power liftgate.

OPTIONS: cargo mat (95), carpeted floor mats (135), cargo net (50), cargo cover (150), cross bars (225).....total 655

TOW HITCH.....425

DESTINATION CHARGE.....1120

TOTAL.....**\$37,290**

SPORTAGE LINEUP / 2022 PRICING

	FWD	AWD
LX	2.4L \$24,090	\$25,590
Nightfall	2.4L 28,090	29,790
EX	2.4L 28,390	29,890
SX	2.0 Turbo 33,750	35,250

Meet generation 5

When we received a 2020 Kia Sportage for review in late 2021, as others' 2022 models were being released, we learned Sportage would be unchanged for those three years and wondered what would be next. A little digging turned up the latest from China (top photo) and Europe (second photo). Then we learned the 2023 Sportage would be revealed on October 27—and here it is (third photo, Sportage X-Pro shown).

Looks like Europe wins, though with a different lower front fascia for ours. Retaining a nod to Kia's long-running "tiger nose" grille and bearing "boomerang" DRLs defining headlight clusters in a more conventional position than the outgoing model, the 2023 Sportage's skin is more angular, described by Kia as "sharp and strong."

Sportage continues to grow in size, the 2023 being 7.1 inches longer than the current generation, as well as taller and wider, producing a current claim of best-in-class rear legroom and cargo capacity. Despite its growth in size and a new 187-hp (preliminary figure) 2.5L engine, Kia anticipates eight percent better fuel mileage.

Also revealed was its new Kia Connect interface to supersede the UVO system. Trims will include LX, EX, SX and SX Prestige, as well as three "adventure ready" trims: X-Line and new X-Pro and X-Pro Prestige (AWD versions also have 1.5 inches of increased ground clearance). Most will be built alongside K5, Sorento and Telluride at Kia's West Point, Georgia plant. ■