

Road beat: Plenty of Soul in 2015 Kia



2015 Kia Soul improves upon the year before. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

All new in 2014, the new 2015 Kia Soul, while maintaining the character and appearance of the original, has received significant improvements that actually enhanced its uniqueness. More interesting is the fact that while a younger hip generation is its prime customer because of its remarkable utility; the Soul is appealing to the everyday compact buyer who is looking for a bit more than buying an appliance.

Soul is extremely practical, a mini CUV without the stigma of owning an SUV or CUV, yet giving its owner the pride of owning

what looks to be a tricked out custom car. Its lines are different, but are done with slick proportions. Just check out the side window lines giving the Soul movement while standing still. Everything fits and has purpose.

Now here is where it gets good. Based on the Rio chassis and its relatively long 101-inch wheelbase, the Soul looks as if its wheels are positioned at the vehicle's extremes because it is only 163-inches long (that's 9 inches shorter than a Rio). Soul looks stable because it is 3 inches wider than a Rio giving it a much wider track of over 2 inches. And even though it stands about 5 inches taller, most of the weight is carried low in the chassis so you don't get that SUV "head tossing feeling." In practical terms, it is a brilliant design.

Under the hood, Soul also stole the 130 hp (at 6,300 rpm) 1.6L inline four cylinder out of the Rio, but added a kicker, a 2.0L inline four that punches out 164 hp at 6,200 rpm and a torque curve that peaks at 151 pounds at a relatively low 4,000 rpm. Connected to a universally shared six speed auto cog swapper, the Soul generates some actual moxie.

While 0-60 mph comes up in 9.15



Specifications

Price

\$15,896 to about \$28,195

Engines

1.6L 16 valve DOHC (CVVT) inline four 130 hp @ 6,300 rpm

118 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 4,850 rpm

2.0L 16 valve DOHC (CVVT) inline four 164 hp @ 6,000 rpm

151 lbs.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm

Transmission

Six speed manual

Six speed automatic

Configuration

Transverse mounted front engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 101.2 inches

Length 163.0 inches

Height 63.0 inches

Width 70.9 inches

Track (f/r) 61.4/61.9 inches

seconds, the Soul feels much quicker. Throttle response and linearity are about perfect making the Soul feel a second or two quicker. Passing performance is good with 50-70 mph coming up in 5.34 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade only slowing about three seconds to 8.67 seconds. Overall the Soul feels like it really scoots.

EPA rates the Soul at 23/31/26 mpg city/highway/combined. In 400 miles of varied driving it does a bit better. Highway mileage at 70 mph settled in at 32-33 mpg, but overall fuel economy in rural driving average between 28-29 mpg. And when you average the total 400 miles, which included performance testing, city stop and go, some time on the highway and two-lane country roads fuel economy dropped to 26-27 mpg which is a schosh better than the EPA combined number. Go with the 2.0L engine, the fuel economy loss of perhaps an mpg is far outweighed by the Soul's improved performance and personality.

Remember that wide track I spoke of before? When you combined that 62-inch track with MacPherson struts up front and a semi-independent transverse torsion beam rear end plus 18 x 7.5 inch alloys shod with super-wide 235/45 series tires and you have a vehicle that goes where you point it without complaint.

Ground clearance 6.5 inches
Weight (1.6/2.0) 2,714/2,837 pounds
Weight distribution (f/r) 60/40 percent
Steering lock to lock 2.85 turns
Turning circle 34.8 feet
Wheels (opt) 7.5X18 inch alloys
Tires (opt) 235/45X18
Fuel capacity 14.2 gallons
Cargo volume (rear seats down/up) 61.3/24.2 cubic feet
Passenger volume 101.0 cubic feet

Performance

0-60 mph 9.15 seconds
50-70 mph 5.34 seconds
50-70 mph uphill 8.67 seconds
Top speed Well into triple digits
Fuel economy EPA rated 23/31/26 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 27 mpg in rural country driving 32-33 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

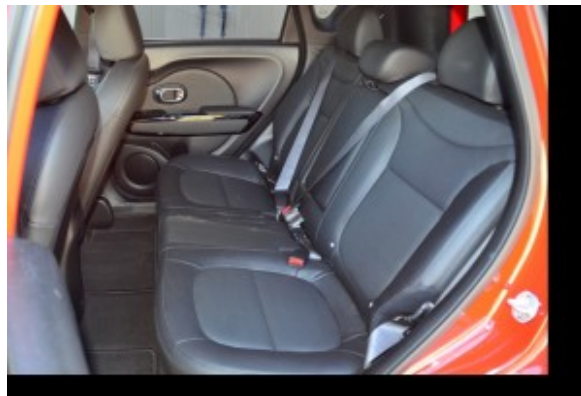
Also helping in the handling department is a quick electric rack that is just 2.85 turns lock to lock. Turn in is very quick with those low profile tires. Flinging the Soul through a series of dozens of corners in a stretch of road that resembles a four mile long contorted snake was excellent, never faltering, never losing its line and with Gorilla Glue like grip. Steering feedback was good as was its over the road on and off center feel. Is it a Porsche? No, but it certainly drives like a small sports sedan and is surprisingly good when the road bends. Turning circle is a tight 34.8 feet.

On the flip side, the Soul delivers a smooth ride especially on the highway while doing a good job of absorbing the punishment from less than friendly roads. No head tossing, no kickback through the steering wheel and no jarring. And despite its upright appearance, there is no wind noise and road noise is quelled. The engine spins a reasonable 2,300 rpm at 70 mph and is inaudible.

Braking is done by four-wheel disc brakes (vented in front) with all the bells and whistles such as ABS, EBD, ESC, VSM, BAS, TCS, Hill start assist and TPMS, a virtual alphabet soup of safety. All that was able to halt the forward progress of the Soul in 42 feet from 40 mph. Very good. If that doesn't float your boat, then its front, side and side curtain airbags will. Perhaps we take too much for granted when you have such automobile safety as even inexpensive cars like the Soul are remarkably safe. But please remember nothing can overcome inattention and stupidity.

Once you are ensconced in the leather driver's perch as in my top of the line Soul Exclaim, identified as "!" you will feel the bit of luxury that is in its genes. And sure, the interior is top quality with excellent fit and finishes. The room is copious front and back and behind the back seat is about 25 cubic feet of cargo capacity. Lower the rear seat and the volume more than doubles.

Instrumentation is complete with big speedo and tach plus a full trip computer, but the real light show starts when you activate the sound system. The main speakers in the doors change colors and the more powerful the music; it seems as if the lighting effect also intensifies. Maybe it is just me, but it is a fun treatment. Hey, it's a hip car and unique. It's not my fault it's so practical as well. Demographics show that the average age of a Soul buyer is 41.



Leg room for those in the back seat.

Pricing starts for a base model with a six-speed manual tranny at \$15,100, plus \$795 for the boat from Korea. Step up to the automatic and add \$2,000. But at least buy the "+" model. For an additional \$1,500 you get the 2.0L engine plus the choice of several desired options which are not available in the base Soul. My ride was a loaded Exclaim which stickers at \$20,700 and has standard features like LED lighting and trick wheels and tires. It also had two option packages, the Sound and Sunroof Package (\$2,600) which is self-explanatory (the sunroof is the whole roof) and a package Kia calls "The Whole Shabang (Kia's spelling, not Webster's and it's \$2,500). It means what it says with items like leather, heated seats front and rear, HID headlights and more. All toll the price of admission for this full boat Soul is \$28,195. Let's face it; hamsters never had it this good. Ask Janet Evanovich's main protagonist, bounty hunter Stephanie Plum.

Larry Weitzman has been into cars since he was 5 years old. At 8 he could recite from memory the hp of every car made in the U.S. He has put in thousands of laps on racetracks all over the Western United States.