

# Road Beat: Kia Sorento SXL – smooth operator



Kia Sorento handles well and is comfortable to drive.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Many auto people think that Hyundai and Kia are basically twins and therefore one would think that the Kia Sorento is the identical twin to the Hyundai Santa Fe. While they may share “hearts” in the form of the powertrain, it ends there. In fact, the Sorento is 6 inches shorter and rides on a 1-inch shorter wheelbase. Sorento is a small midsize at just 187 inches on a 109-inch wheelbase. Width is broad in the shoulders at 74 inches. Sorento’s AWD system only adds 133 pounds to its weight.

While the design of the Santa Fe is edgy, the new Sorento has

a softer, smoother rounded surface without any sharp lines, except for a scallop in the rear rocker area. It uses the signature Kia grille and integrates its design theme from there. It is one attractive CUV. About the only "average" design point on the Sorento is the termination of the rear quarter window.

Under the hood resides Kia's extremely smooth and efficient 3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 that cranks out 290 hp at 6,400 rpm and 252 pounds of twist at 5,300 rpm. It drives all four wheels via a 6-speed torque converter tranny. And this is one smooth and powerful powerplant. Zero to 60 mph arrives in just 7.02 seconds. Its responsiveness is linear and eager. Passing times are also quick with a 50-70 mph simulated pass requiring 3.85 seconds and the same simulation up a steep grade only slowing that time to 6.18 seconds. That is getting down the road for a 4,343-pound vehicle. It is rated to tow 5,000 pounds when properly equipped. The gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) is a whopping 5,622 pounds giving the Sorento a huge 1,300-pound payload.

As an aside, Sorento also has two other engine choices, a 2.4L inline 4 with 185 hp and 178 pounds of twist. It is also found in the Optima where it performs beautifully, but might be a bit anemic in the Sorento. While the window sticker may reflect better fuel economy, I doubt it is any better than the V-6 as you will read in the following paragraph. The other choice is a 2.0L turbo (240 hp, 260 pounds of twist) which I found to do a very good job with respect to performance and fuel economy in a smaller CUV model (Santa Fe Sport) which you may have read. I also tested the 2.0L turbo in last year's Sorento and the test results show almost identical passing performance with acceleration to 60 mph about half a second slower. But here is the deal, fuel economy was superior with the V-6 by as much as four mpg on the Tahoe trip and at least two mpg on the highway at 70 mph. So I suggest that you go with the V-6 if possible but the 2.0L turbo four might be a

good choice as well. The V-6 is a \$1,600 upgrade over the 2.0L turbo.



### **Specifications**

Price \$25,400 to \$45,700

### **Engine**

3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 290 hp @ 6,400 rpm

252 lb-ft of torque @ 5,200 rpm

2.0L DOHC, 16 valve, turbo charged inline 4 240 hp @ 6,000

260 lb-ft of torque 1,450-3,500 rpm

2.4L DOHC, 16 valve inline 4 185 hp @6,000 rpm

178 lb-ft of torque @ 4,000 rpm

### **Transmission**

Six speed automatic with manual mode

### **Configuration**

Transverse mounted front engine/FWD/AWD

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 109.4 inches

Length 187.4 inches

Width 74.4 inches  
Height 66.5 inches  
Track (f/r) 64.1/64.5 inches  
Weight 4,343 pounds  
GVWR 5,622 pounds  
Weight Distribution (f/r)  
59/41  
Fuel capacity 18.8 gallons  
Tow capacity 5,000 pounds  
Steering lock to lock 2.9  
turns  
Turning circle 36.4 feet  
Wheels (std/opt)  
17X7.0/19X7.5 alloys  
Tires  
(std/opt)235/65X17/235/60X18  
/235/55X19  
Interior volume (2nd row  
up/down, 3rd row up)  
38.0/73.0/11.3 cubic feet

**Performance**  
0-60 mph 7.02 seconds  
50-70 3.85 seconds  
50-70 mph uphill 6.18  
seconds  
Top speed governed at 130  
mph  
Fuel economy EPA rated  
17/23/19 mpg  
city/highway/combined.  
Expect 23-24 mpg in rural  
and suburban driving and 32  
mpg on a level highway at  
legal speeds.

Fuel economy is rated by EPA testing at 17/23/19 mpg city/highway/combined. But I don't know if the EPA pulled a

plug wire or whether they left the emergency brake on, but the lowest fuel economy recorded by the Road Beat was 21.6 mpg in heavy freeway traffic much of it stop and go and during some full throttle performance testing. Overall the Sorento averaged 23-24 mpg. On the highway at 70 mph on a two way run on level ground 31.9 mpg. During a round trip from Placerville to South Lake Tahoe which includes a 6,000-foot climb over the Sierras the Sorento averaged 26.6 mpg. The fuel tank is a large 18.8 gallons.

As to handling the chassis is state of the art MacPherson struts up front and a multilink system in the rear and those broad shoulders allow for a wide stance of 64 inches of track. Rolling gear are 19 x 7.5 inch alloys shod with wide 235/55 series rubber. Steering is just under three turns lock to lock and it does a 360 degree turn within 37.2 feet. Sorento actually corners with aplomb with great grip and accurate steering albeit a bit numb. It just means it requires more attention when doing the cha-cha in the tight twisties. But it clearly has good cornering power, far more than most drivers will ever demand. It is a real pleasure to drive. Impressive.

Now here is where it gets good. Sorento is one of the smoothest and quietest CUVs on the planet. It was noticeable on my first drive. It became a magic carpet. It ran as if the engine was off, ethereal. It's that good. It handles bumps in a sublime, well controlled manner. One of the best rides I have encountered. As to quiet, one must think in a whisper while in the Sorento, there is no engine, wind or road noise except when under full throttle acceleration and then the smooth V-6 emits a mild, pleasant roar, not bad for a V-6. But again this 3.3L unit is one of my favorite engines manufactured today.

Braking performance is strong from its huge disc brakes (over a foot in diameter ventilated fronts). And it has a standard autonomous emergency braking system which is new for 2017. Of course it has most every conceivable safety acronym including

adaptive front head lights all standard. About the only thing it didn't have was a lane keeping assist, but it did have lane departure warning, again all standard on the SXL model.

On the inside is another winning interior. This is a luxury ride with gorgeous nappa perforated leather seats, soft touch materials everywhere else, on the doors, dash and center console. The seats are done in a dark charcoal on the side trim with the faces being covered in a cream leather with deep bolstering. They are comfortable. I thought about grabbing one for my office chair. Shoulder room is almost 60 inches giving the interior an extremely spacious feel. Cargo capacity is good size at 73 cubes behind the front chairs and 38 feet behind the second row and almost 12 cubes behind the third row.

The instrument panel has all the instrumentation, trip computer, speedo, tach and ancillary gauges. The center stack is well done with a big screen info center for the radio, nav and other info. Operation of the systems is intuitive, simple and tastefully done.

Did I like the Sorento? You bet. Pricing for this Best in class and top of the line ride Sorento SXL starts and ends at \$45,700 plus \$895 for the train and truck from West Point, Georgia assembly plant. Even the floor mats are standard equipment. Such a deal.

*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.*