

Road Beat: 2017 Kia Soul: An exciting Exclaim



The 2017 Kia Soul is a fun vehicle to drive. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Modern engineering and machines have allowed automakers to produce cars that are a bit out of the three-box mainstream design. While Kia may have started off with its less than exciting Sephia over 20 years ago, under its new president and chief design officer, Peter Schreyer, Kia has gone to the forefront in automotive design with the Optima, Cadenza, Forte and new Stinger due out in a few months. Within this new design philosophy came the Soul, which has been with us for about eight years and created a new kind of sub-compact utility vehicle.

Soul received more soul in 2014 with marginal one inch increases in length, width and wheelbase now measuring 163 x 71 and 101 inches, respectively. It also received structural enhancements with more bending and torsional resistance and minor design changes with a squarer front end and new taillight treatments. Overall it is still unmistakably a Soul, only improved in its design and utility. There is no question the hipster hamster contingency is happy with the new Soul and for 2017 several new additions and improvements might even dazzle a few humans.

New for 2017 and under hood of this new top of the line Exclaim (!) is a new high powered version of Kia's 1.6L direct injected turbo four cranking out a whopping 201 hp at 6,000 rpm and a strong 195 pounds of twist from 1,500 to 4,500 rpm. It is connected to a quick shifting and smooth seven-speed dual clutch automatic (also new for 2017) that transmits the energy to the front wheels. Kia does not offer an all-wheel drive option, but if it did it might eat into its compact CUV sales as the buyer demographics for the Soul are surprising, with the average buyer being a 41-year-old female, not a 23-year-old hipster. Maybe the 41-year-old female is a hot cougar. Whatever the buyer, the Soul is a smart buy in so many ways.



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 torque converter
automatic

Seven speed dual clutch
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

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.

First is its performance, which is rockin' with 0-60 mph times averaging 6.48 seconds. It could have been quicker but even with huge 235/45 series rubber, hook up was a problem and it would shift into second too quickly because of wheelspin. With a bit more experimentation it might have broken the six second barrier.

Passing performance backed up the 0-60 mph numbers with a 50-70 mph pass requiring just 3.74 seconds and the same run up a steep (6-7 percent) grade only slowing that time by a second to 4.79. There is a hint of turbo lag but once on boost it becomes a rocket sled.

Fuel economy is rated at 26/31/28 mpg city/highway/combined by the EPA. Interestingly, of the three Soul engines offered, a 1.6L 130 hp four, a 2.0L 161 hp four and this diminutive turbo powerhouse, the powerhouse returns the best EPA fuel economy numbers by about an mpg. Overall I averaged 28-29 mpg and on a

level highway at 70 mph in a two-way run the Soul averaged 32.8 mpg with the engine spinning 2,200 rpm. A taller seventh gear might have improved that highway mileage by an mpg or two. While the fuel tank is 14.2 gallons, a bit bigger would be better.

Wheels are good looking 18 x 7.5 inch alloys shod with the aforementioned big rubber and while state of the art MacPherson struts are up front, a semi-independent torsion beam holds up the rear. Steering is an electric power rack with just 2.85 turns lock to lock. You might not think of the Soul with its tall 63 inch stature as a handler, but it is. It's almost go-cart like as it has track of nearly 62 inches front and rear giving it the ability to make short work of the twisties. In fact, when examining the overall design, the Soul has little in front and rear overhangs as the wheels are located at its furthest most points. Turn in is crisp and understeer is quite mild. It may look like a mini ute, but it handles like a sports sedan.

Another enduring quality is the quiet and smooth ride. It exceeded my expectations with a very quiet engine, no wind and tire noise. When driving, you have to remember the Soul's roots which are sedan based and not a truck.

Also for 2017 safety has been improved with larger front ventilated disc brakes now exceeding a foot in diameter. They are strong and of course all the acronyms are present like ABS, TCS, ESM, VSM and more. Also, new in the Exclaim (!) are standard HID headlights which are excellent in low and very good in high beam. Even the new well located (on the center console) starter button is a nice feature.

Because of its literal two box design, the Soul as a subcompact car has the volume of a large size car with 101.2 cubic feet in the first two rows and 24.2 cubic feet behind the second row. Behind the front seats are over 61 cubic feet of room for camping or the Home Depot. Having a Soul is not

just spiritual thing, it's way practical.

And those front chairs are nicely done and quite comfortable in their leather and cloth trim. Sure, the interior is highly styled with the way the speakers are done, but the dash is about perfect with clear legible business like gauges consisting of a big tach and speedo divided by an info center and trip computer. The center stack is also easy to use. Practical. Rear seating is also good for even three, thanks to Soul's excellent shoulder room.

Now for the best part, the price. My top of the line tester with power windows, doors, locks, cruise, trick leather wrapped D shaped steering wheel and a whole bunch more stickers for a paltry \$22,800 plus \$850 for the boat from Korea. This is a tricked out, very practical ride that oozes with cool and style for the price of an ordinary econo-box. And it goes like a scalded dog on steroids while passing most gas stations. A paltry price, practical ride that you can park anywhere with style. And then there is the five year/60,000 mile overall warranty plus 10 years and a 100,000 mile warranty on the powertrain.

If your needs aren't to run like a scalded dog and maybe just a nice retriever suits your needs, a base Soul starts at just \$16,100 plus \$850. Never has so little bought so much cool. You could sell your refrigerator and turn off you're AC.

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.