

Road Beat: Kia Forte 5 SX strong on performance



The Kia Forte 5 SX is a small package with big performance. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

Kia Forte 5 is a small car even though it is considered a compact, as it has an interior volume of about 100 cubic feet with a cargo capacity of over 23 cubes. Fold down the rear seat and it becomes a mini-ute with 54 cubes of volume. It is a practical design.

However, while it has a great looking, aggressive front end, the aft end and its truncated window line and rear end are not exactly my favorite. But that's the end of the negatives as the rest of the Road Beat is all positive.

Forte 5 rides on a long 106-inch wheelbase while measuring just 171 inches in length. It is a reasonable 70 inches wide and stands 57 inches tall. But as above, it's big inside.

Forte 5's get one of two engines either a 2.0L 164 hp power house which should make for lively performance as it only weighs 3,000 pounds or in the top of the line SX model you get a downsized 1.6L inline four banger, but it has a turbo which takes peak hp to 201 at a low 6,000 rpm and peak torque which hardly peaks as it is flat as a slab of marble from 1,500-4,500 rpm cranking out a stout 195 pounds twist between those rpms which is caused by the engine controller limiting boost but holding peak torque almost throughout the entire rev range. It makes for a very flexible engine being able to twaddle along in top (sixth gear at 1,500 rpm and still pull away smartly without a downshift. In the lower gears hand on to your hat (when the sun roof in open).



Specifications

Engine

2.0L DOHC, 16 valve inline four cylinder 164 hp @ 6,200 rpm

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

1.6L DOHC, 16 valve turbo inline four cylinder 201 hp @ 6,000 rpm

195 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,500-4,500 rpm

Transmissions

2.0L Six-speed torque convert

Transmissions

2.0L

Six-speed torque convert
automatic

1.6L turbo

Six-speed manual

Seven-speed dual clutch automated
manual

Configuration

Transverse mounted front
engine/front wheel drive

Dimensions

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 171.3 inches

Width 70.1 inches

Height 57.1 inches

Track (f/r) 60.8/61.3 inches

Ground clearance 5.5 inches

Fuel capacity 13.2 gallons

Cargo capacity rear seats up/down
23.2/56.4 cubic feet

Weight 2,976 pounds

GVWR 3,990 pounds

Steering lock to lock 2.85 turns

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Wheels 81X7.5 inches

Tires 225/40X18

Performance

0-60 mph 6.23 seconds

50-70 mph 3.00 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 4.32 seconds

Top speed Estimated 140-145 mph

Fuel economy EPA rated 23/29/25
mpg. Expect 28 mpg in rural
country driving and 37 mpg on a
level highway at legal speeds.

Performance is strong with the ability to knock off 0-60 mph in an average of 6.23 seconds. Passing performance is also

super quick with a 50-70 mph run taking three seconds flat and the same run up a 6-7 percent grade only slowing that time to 4.32 seconds. Only a Honda Si, a VW GTI or a couple of other Hyundais and Kias using the same engine are in this class of performance. Everything else is in second place or much farther behind. Even with the turbo, in my first drive I was literally "blown away" by the instantaneous throttle response. This thing boogies.

As to the throttle, in the first three gears it pulls well from just 1,500 rpm, where it can make peak torque because of the turbo boost and by 2,000 rpm it will pull smartly even in sixth gear. Going up the Sierra at over 6,000 feet where the grade is at least 6 percent, it would pull like a freight train is fifth at just 2,500 rpm where it is making about 100 hp. I remember when a 1.6L inline four wouldn't make 100 hp at 6,000 rpm. Ah, the benefits of boost. And did I mention this is one of the smoothest inline fours the Road Beat has encountered?

EPA fuel economy numbers appear to be pretty dismal at 23/29/25 mpg city/highway/combined, but even when putting the pedal to the metal in very aggressive driving I averaged 26 mpg. However, in more normal driving expect about 28-29 mpg and in a 70 mph two-way run on a level highway the Forte 5 SX averaged 36 mpg. More telling was my two-way average from Placerville to Carson City and back where the Forte averaged 37.1 mpg. EPA testing must have been done with a spark plug wire missing or something. Fuel tank is of average capacity at 13.2 gallons. Bigger would be nicer.

Handling is very good and sporty as it has the credentials, MacPherson struts up front and a coupled torsion beam in the rear, a quick electric rack at 2.85 turns lock to lock, big 225/40 series rubber on wide 7.5 x 18 inch good looking alloys and a wide 61 and 62-inch track. And it does handle and when pushed very hard in the twisties, understeer seemed to want to turn into oversteer. Most drivers will never get that far, but

its grip is strong, with a crisp turn-in and a flat attitude. On and off-center feel is also very good. In other words, it is most fun when the road bends. I would call it playful.

The ride is extremely smooth and it is quiet. The only time tire noise becomes even apparent is on coarse roads, but smooth asphalt will leave you thinking is a whisper. While most bumps don't get through the insulation of the suspension, hard jolts can be heard. That's about it in the ride department. The engine spins a little fast, 3,000 rpm at 70 mph in top gear. The seven speed DCT would spin about 2,400 rpm and probably return a couple more mpg and actually improve its already stellar performance.

Safety includes most of the acronyms including an excellent back up camera, but no blind spot detection, something I didn't miss as a good driver prides himself in situational awareness. Headlights are HID and very good on low and high beam.

Inside is a two-tone leather interior done in a dark charcoal (Kia calls it black) with some bordering orange trim. Snazzy and comfortable, with full power adjustability for the driver and heating and ventilation for both driver and shotgun. Instrumentation is complete with a center info center and a big tach and speedo flanking left and right. Perfect. The rest of the interior is all first rate materials, with a few surprises like the "D" shaped leather wrapped steering wheel and leather shifter. Nice.

On top of the center stack is a big seven-inch color screen for NAV and the sound system and they are intuitive and very easy to use. BMW take a lesson. Great sounding radio.

Rear seating is a 60/40 split and according to a rear seat passenger quite comfortable.

As to the Forte 5's utility re-read the first two paragraphs, for just 171 inches it can haul the mail and then some.

So what is the damage control for such an exceedingly fun ride probably made more fun by the addition of the DCT? How about \$26,000, but if you want the obligatory floor mats add \$125 and then the delivery charge of \$895 from its Pesqueria, Mexico, assembly plant and if that doesn't surprise, 82 percent of the content is from Mexico, including the engine. The tranny comes from Japan.

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.