

Road Beat: 2018 Kia Stinger GT2 AWD stands out



Dollar-for-dollar the 2018 Kia Stinger GT2 AWD has top in its class. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

It has been a long time coming, but the day that Korea could claim to be the manufacturer of the best performance sedan value in the world has arrived in the form of the Kia Stinger.

While it is built in Sohari, South Korea, its origins and design are all German. Stinger was penned in Frankfurt, Germany, by Peter Schreyer (now president of Kia North America and the designer of the Audi TT) and Greg Guillaume, Kia's chief designer. Kia's new executive VP of performance, Albert Biermann, whose prior work includes being the former vice president and head of engineering for BMW M series super high-

performance cars, headed the engineering team for the Stinger. The results were obvious, Stinger is a leadoff grand salami right out of the box. It is the best performance sedan value in the world.

First, Stinger is beautiful with some of the best lines ever to grace a midsize sedan. A massive, yet sleek aggressive front-end flows rearward creating a slick window line that terminates in a rear end that reminds an automobile gourmet of either an Audi A7 or an Alfa Guilia. Everyone who sees it remarks of its fabulous design and looks. While a perfect midsize 190 inches long, Stinger rides on a huge 114-inch wheelbase meaning lots of rear leg room and a smoother ride. At 74 inches wide it sports broad shoulders, strong hips with bulging muscles. The smooth roof line flows into a hatchback design that still looks like a slick sedan.



Specifications

Price \$32,800 to \$52,300

Engine

2.0L DOHC 16 valve direct injected turbo four cylinder

255 hp @ 6,200 rpm

260 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,400-4,000 rpm

3.3L DOHC 24 valve directed injected turbo V-6 365 hp @ 6,000 rpm

376 lb.-ft. of torque @

1,300-4,500 rpm

Transmission

Eight-speed torque converter
automatic

Configuration

Longitudinal front
engine/RWD/AWD

Dimensions

Wheelbase 114.4 inches

Length 190.2 inches

Width 73.6 inches

Height 55.1 inches

Track (f/r) (19-inch wheels)
62.6/63.7

Weight (V-6/AWD 4,023 pounds

Fuel tank 15.9 gallons

Turning circle 38.4 feet

Steering lock to lock (AWD)
2.1 turns

Wheels (19-inch f/r)
19X8/19X8.5 inches

Tires (f//r)
225/40X19//255/35X19

Passenger volume 93.8 cubic
feet

Cargo volume (seats up/down
23.3/40.9 cubic feet

Brake diameter (f/r)
13.8/13.4 inches

Performance

0-60 mph 4.66 seconds

50-70 mph 2.00 seconds

50-70 mph uphill 2.47
seconds

Top speed Governed @ 167 mph

Fuel economy (V-6 AWD) EPA
rated 19/25/21

city/highway/combined mpg. Expect 22-23 mpg in rural suburban driving and 27 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

OK, so the Stinger is beautiful, but does it fulfill its promises. The one-word answer is yes, and then some. No other sports sedan comes close for the money. There are two engine choices, a 2.0L DOHC twin scroll turbo charged four belting out 255 hp at 6,200 rpm and 260 pounds of twist between 1,400 to 4,000 rpm and a 3.3L DOHC twin turbo V-6 monster motor that cranks out 365 hp at 6,000 rpm and 376 pounds of twist from 1,300 to 4,500 rpm. My tester was the GT model, which means the V-6. Both engines are longitudinally mounted to drive the rear wheels but also have an AWD option. Whatever the configuration, both engines drive through the same super slick eight speed torque converter auto cog-swapper. And, yes, there are paddle shifters. My tester was an AWD version which adds about 200 pounds and \$2,200 as my fully optioned GT2 AWD tester weighed in at 4,023 pounds, certainly no lightweight.

Developing on that theme, performance is heavyweight as in champion of the world. It's not the fastest or quickest car in the world as there are \$70,000 to \$150,000 sedans that accomplish the 0-60 mph feat in 4 seconds flat. The least expensive being the \$70K base BMW M4 RWD. But by the same token a base Kia Stinger GT with RWD stickers for \$38K making it the absolute best performance sedan buy in the world by tens of thousands of dollars.

My AWD Stinger did the 0-60 mph deed in an amazing 4.66 seconds. In studying the literature, the RWD version, which can be had for about \$38K with a huge standard equipment list including leather will do the deed in about 4.4 seconds. There are no other sporting sedans or otherwise that offer this kind of World Class performance for such low bucks. Maybe a Mustang

GT or a Nissan 370Z, but certainly not if you are thinking Subaru WRX sti.

Passing numbers are also astounding with a 50-70 mph simulated pass taking 2 seconds and the same run up a steep (6-7 percent) grade only slows that time to 2.47 seconds. But there is more. Throttle response is almost instant off the line and once underway this engine and tranny respond like a sledgehammer as it might drop a couple of gears or four and be at full boost in about an eye blink. Part throttle response is wonderful acting like a direct connection to your brain. It's almost unbelievable. But driving in slow traffic, no problem as the throttle is easy to modulate and feather foot.

OK, so it has super car performance, but what about fuel economy. EPA says to expect 10/25/21 mpg city/highway/combined. It does a little better averaging 27.3 mpg on a level highway two-way run at 70 mph with the engine turning a low 1,750 rpm. In my 200-mile round trip to Carson City the Stinger returned a surprising 25.9 mpg with the run from Carson City to Placerville averaging 28.9 mpg. But overall for 500 miles the average was 21.7 mpg, but this was 500 miles of hammering and almost no time on the interstate. In this day an age not exactly stellar fuel economy, but with some restraint you might achieve an extra mpg or two. About the only negative is the Stinger's relatively small 15.9-gallon fuel tank. It should be at least 18 gallons, a minimum for a GT car like the Stinger. The four cylinder should average 3-4 mpg better.

Handling is also spectacular. Of course, suspension is state of the art independent. Steering on the AWD is super quick 2.1 turns lock to lock and my tester had fitment of beautiful staggered 19-inch alloys, 8.0 inches wide in the front and 8.5 inches in the rear shod with super high-performance Michelins Pilot Sport rubber 225/40s in front and 255/35s in the rear. Track is 63 and 64 inches respectively front and rear. Grip seems limitless and roll control is perfect and the variable

ratio electric rack steering is super accurate. It handles absolutely perfect, straightening out the twisties easily and effortlessly as a true GT car should. It is easy to place in a corner, exactly where you want, holding its line perfectly. It's magic. Some saying the RWD handles better than the AWD partly due to less weight.

Some early reports talked of a stiff and unsettled ride. However, my tester with all the suspension bells and whistles actually had a sublime ride and while firm when necessary had some softness to it. Some drivers may actually find the ride on the cushy side. Control of body motions was perfect. Wind, engine and road noise are nonexistent at cruise with the engine spinning a low 1,750 rpm. However, engineers tuned the exhaust note from near a near zero murmur to an enhanced note befitting the Stinger's world class performance. In fact, the whole car can be set up customized to the driver's preference or he/she can select one of four driving modes preset at the factory (eco, comfort, normal and sport).

I was able to log a few miles in a new four-cylinder Stinger, courtesy of the folks at Folsom Lake Kia for comparison. It was almost equally as impressive. In fact, for most drivers it is as impressive. The 255 hp felt more like 300 hp and it sounded like a throaty V-6, making it the best sounding inline four on the market. Wow. I hope to do a full test in the next several months.

Safety is special. With all the acronyms including lane keep assist. Brakes are also special with huge Brembo ventilated discs with four piston calipers up front and two piston calipers in the rear. They are powerful and progressive. Headlights are fabulous LED with auto high beams and directional control.

While leather is the standard bill of fare in all Stingers, the GT2 gets super soft Nappa leather and the heated/cooled power seats are sublime with terrific lateral support.

Instrumentation is complete with a three way trip/info computer that is flanked left and right by a big tach and speedo. Within the info center are boost and torque meters, lap timers and a "g" meter. Trick stuff belying the fact that Stinger is a world class super sports sedan.

With its extra long wheelbase rear seating legroom is huge. Cargo volume is enhanced by its hatchback design with over 23 cubic feet which expands to over 40 cubes with the rear seats folded flat.

Stinger has no flaws; it is about as perfect as you can get except for the smaller fuel tank. How about at least 18 gallons, Kia? Pricing starts at just \$31,900, plus \$900 for the boat from Korea for a 2.0L turbo four RWD with 255 hp which should get to 60 mph in the low sixes. That is the performance bargain of the decade. A GT with the super 3.3L turbo V-6 RWD starts at the bargain price of \$38,350 making it the best performance sedan bargain in the World. Zero to 60 mph in about 4.4 seconds. But wait, the \$32,800 base four cylinder, which should get to 60 mph in about six seconds flat may even be a better near luxo, performance sedan buy. My top of the line, loaded GT2 AWD stickered for \$51,400 and is also a World beater bargain. Any Stinger will make a believer out of you. It's what will be in my garage.

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.