



auto BIOGRAPHIES

Kia Rio 1.4D EcoDynamics 2
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WAY BACK in 1992 I had a friend who took driving lessons later than the rest of our social circle. How we laughed. Not at the fact that he was learning to drive at 21 (most of us had passed our test at 17), but at the car his instructor turned up in: a Kia Pride.

It was the first time any of us had heard of Kia and to be honest the way the South Korean car company had described their car didn't help. It certainly wasn't anything to be proud of. For a start, we all thought it resembled a milk float and I seem to recall it also had white-wall tyres – a definite fashion faux pas.

But fast-forward nearly 20 years and Kia has turned itself around. It is no longer an ugly budget car brand. It is far from that. You now get an awful lot for your money and people are more likely to comment on what a nice motor you have rather than sniggering about milk floats. Take the latest incarnation of the Rio. I was lucky enough to be one of a few European journalists to test drive the latest offering from Kia in Portugal last summer.

Sleek, economical, and loaded up with equipment found in cars a class or two above, the Rio is a revolution, not an evolution from its predecessor and I reckon it'll be a car that people will want to buy for its looks, as well as its environmental credentials.

The Kia Rio's CO2 emissions start at just 85 g/km; that puts it ahead of all other B-segment vehicles currently on sale in Europe. The new model is longer, wider and lower, and features a wheelbase extended by 70 mm – greatly enhancing passenger space and cargo capacity. With an overall height of 1,455 mm, the new Rio has one of the lowest rooflines in Kia's European product range, emphasising its purposeful stance.

The 1.4 diesel Rio I test drove performed well. It was hushed for an oil-burner and, although far from quick off the mark, it had enough pull up and down and around the bends of Lisbon's roads to satisfy. The six-speed gearbox was slick, body lean wasn't overly pronounced and room behind the wheel and in the passenger footwell was good. Rear legroom wasn't astounding, but certainly adequate enough for a car of this size. The cabin materials felt hard-

wearing and the seats were comfortable. Only a few hard plastic areas around the electric window switches let the interior down. The boot was also surprisingly spacious – certainly big enough to fit a small pushchair and some shopping bags in with ease.

The new Rio's built in sat-nav is seamlessly fitted into the centre of the car's dashboard and easy to use. To be honest, its directions got me more lost than anything, but that could be due to the new road layouts around Lisbon. Other than that I found it difficult to find much wrong with the Korean car.

The five-door Rio is the first variant to go on sale in Europe with the all-new three-door model joining Kia's line-up during 2012. The East Asian car manufacturer's market research predicts that global demand for B-segment cars like the Rio is going to grow significantly over the next two years as consumers increasingly shift to economical, more fuel-efficient cars – downsizing to offset the continuous rise in fuel prices.

With Kia upping its game to produce good looking cars like the latest Rio, I can see every reason why the motor company is confident that it's going to go from strength to strength. I certainly won't be laughing about anyone getting into a Kia again. And there'll be no more mention of milk floats.



FAST FACTS

Max speed: 107 mph
 0-62 mph: 14.2 secs
 Combined mpg: 68.9
 Engine: 1396 cc 4 cylinder, in line diesel
 Max. power (bhp): 89 at 4000 rpm
 Max. torque (lb/ft): 162 at 1750 - 2750 rpm
 CO2: 109 g/km
 Price: £14,195 (approx)

PROS 'N' CONS

Looks ✓

Comfort ✓

Economical ✓

Slow of the mark ✗