

Kia Optima 1.7 CRDi '3'

THE OPTIMA is the all-new flagship saloon that is the latest model to be launched in Kia's design-led product offensive. It went on sale in the UK in February, bringing fantastic design, high levels of standard specification and low running costs.

By Tim Barnes-Clay, Motoring Writer

www.carwriteups.co.uk

Twitter: @carwriteups



The Kia Optima is a credible car for business. It looks sharp and handles any commute admirably. The steering lacks feel, so you don't get much sense of connection with the road surface, but the car is comfortable, has enough power, and is easy to live with.

It is sold only with a diesel engine – a new 134 bhp version of Kia's smooth and efficient 1.7-litre CRDi 'U2' power unit – but the Optima contains every essential for the corporate user. Features include a high-end Infinity audio system, self-parking, heated and cool-ventilated seats, cornering lights, panoramic sunroof, reverse parking camera and an automatic cabin defogging system.

The interior is youthful and sporty, and the fascia tilts towards you so that all the major controls are within your sight-line for best visibility and ease of use. Slim armrests in the doors have integral audio speakers, freeing up more storage space in the panel beneath. And, in the top-of-the-range Optima 3, on test here, mood lighting in the lower part of the doors and the centre fascia adds to the cabin's already sophisticated ambience.

The Optima is based on an all-new platform which ensures it has class-leading passenger and luggage space and safety features while being no larger than its competitors. The boot is decently roomy, and there is a lower lip to make loading the car less strenuous. The 60:40 split folding rear seats also allow longer loads to be transported.

It is a safe motor too. All versions have Electronic Stability Control (ESC) to counter any tendency of the car to skid out of control because of bad weather or over-exuberant driving. This is linked to Vehicle Stability Management (VSM), which senses when the wheels on one side of the car are on a lower-grip surface than those on the other side. VSM then stabilises the car by reducing the amount of steering assistance if you are applying too much steering effort, or increasing it if you are applying too little.

To alert other motorists to sudden braking, an Emergency Stop Signalling system (ESS) is also fitted. This flashes the brake lights rapidly to warn following drivers. In addition, the Optima is fitted with front, side and curtain airbags, plus active front-seat head restraints to minimise the risk of whiplash injuries.

The manual version of the Optima features Kia's EcoDynamics fuel-saving, CO2-reducing measures, including Intelligent Stop & Go and aerodynamic drag-reducing measures. The diesel engine develops similar power and torque to the 2.0-litre units in European and Japanese rivals, but from a smaller capacity. Acceleration from 0-60 mph takes 10.2 seconds, and the car can reach a top speed of 125 mph. Better still, the Optima can achieve 57.6 miles per gallon, and it only pumps out CO2 emissions of 128 g/km.

The Optima's ride provides the perfect combination of stability with refinement on the long motorway drives that are a fact of life for many business drivers. Extensive noise-reduction measures ensure minimal transmission of engine and road sound, while the low co-efficient of drag not only helps fuel economy but also minimises wind turbulence.

As with all Kias, the Optima comes with the South Korean company's unique seven-year or 100,000-mile warranty, which is fully transferable to subsequent owners.

PROS 'N' CONS

- Looks ✓
- Comfort ✓
- Room ✓
- Efficiency ✓
- Steering lacks feel X

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 125 mph
- 0-60 mph: 10.2 secs
- Combined mpg: 57.6
- Engine: 1685 cc 4 cylinder turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 134 at 4000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 325 at 2000-2500 rpm
- CO2: 128 g/km
- Price: £24,495 on the road