

K I A e-Niro

The new Kia e-Niro has already proven popular with customers, with the Korean company struggling to meet demand with supply, and the UK's entire 2019 allocation selling out in less than a month. Has Kia finally put to rest the reservations of electric-car naysayers? Tim Barnes-Clay and Jonathan Musk get behind the wheel to find out...

WORDS: Tim Barnes-Clay & Jonathan Musk. PHOTOS: Kia

TBC: The cynics tend to think that vehicles without combustion engines don't have the range or the performance of 'regular' cars – and they always slam the price. Well, after having a first drive of the e-Niro in South Korea I'm pleased to report that Kia will probably turn these disbelievers into believers. Why? Well, the e-Niro is more credible than any electric car to date, including Hyundai's mechanically related Kona Electric. While the two vehicles have similar powertrains and platforms, the Kia houses its ingenious technology in a more traditionally-designed and more down-to-earth bundle.

JM: With prices in the UK starting from £32,995 (inc. PICG) and in Europe at around 38,500€, the e-Niro isn't what you might call cheap. However, with at just £1,000 more than the flagship Nissan Qashqai, electric price parity is arguably already here. However, it's likely to be the finance deals that set the standard and they're a relatively hard sell with the e-Niro costing twice as much as Kia's own Sportage model. But, total cost of ownership comes into play with all EVs and the cost savings on fuel and tax, for both private and business owners quickly stack up in the e-Niro's favour.

TBC: The pure-electric e-Niro looks almost the same as its plug-in and hybrid bedfellows, although there are some restrained alterations. Look intently, and you'll spot the

sleeker front bumper, a fared-in grille and 17-inch alloys. The rear of the Kia wears a modified trim to complement the nose too, helping provide a more slippery shape.

JM: That slippery shape equates to a low 0.28cd drag coefficient that translates to a quiet cabin and it's not just skin deep either. Kia's engineers have added a dynamic damper and strengthened the chassis by using the battery to their advantage – making the e-Niro 21% stiffer than regular hybrid-powered Niro models – improving handling.

TBC: Inside, the car is like other Niros. The dashboard is bland yet functional, there's an ultra-modern infotainment system and importantly, there's space for five. The most obvious difference though, is within the centre console. The usual gear selector has been replaced with a rotary dial. This little change in detail unfurls some additional storage room, too.

JM: There's no question this is a Niro, but the cabin is elevated by the electric components. Similar to the Kona Electric, paddle shifters offer adjustable regen and with a secret weapon too: pull and hold on the left-hand paddle and the car will come to a complete stop using regen alone, while the other paddle provides coasting for exceptional cruising economy.





TBC: The e-Niro's 451-litre boot is larger than the ubiquitous Nissan Qashqai's, but it's less than the 510-litres in the Seat Ateca. Mind you, it's still a good size, and you can store the charging cables under the load floor.

JM: The space is indeed practical and with square proportions its well-sized to fit shopping and kid's buggies. Although Kia claim the e-Niro to be an SUV, it's more like a C-segment estate with SUV styling and the boot is larger in volume than the Nissan Leaf's.

TBC: At the time of writing, there's just one trim level to select – and it's called the First Edition. Okay, it's not very original, but who cares when you get a car as well kitted-out as this? The e-Niro in this guise comes with a reversing camera, heated leather seats, lane keep assist and forward collision warning. The Kia doesn't possess LED headlights, though – and that's a shame.

JM: The UK is only getting the larger 64kWh battery variant, whereas certain markets will be offered a smaller 39kWh version too. Paint colour options are muted compared to the hybrid Niros, with standard no-cost brown or a choice of blue, grey, black or white on the First Edition. Red and fifty shades of grey will be available soon, however. Some of the technicals are also being pioneered on the e-Niro that will then trickle

Specification

2019 Kia e-Niro

Max speed: 104mph
 0-62mph: 7.5 secs
 EV Range: 282 miles*
 Battery: 64kWh, lithium-ion polymer, 356V, 457kg
 Power: 204hp
 Torque: 395Nm
 Motor: Permanent magnet AC
 Drive: Single speed auto, FWD
 Charging: 9hrs 50mins @ 7kW
 54mins 0-80% @ 100kW
 Economy: 149Wh/km*
 Kerb Weight: 1,812kg
 Price: £36,495 OTR exc. PICG
 *WLTP combined

IMAGES FROM TOP

Kia sells the e-Niro as an SUV, but it's better thought of as an estate. Unlike the original Kia Soul EV, the e-Niro uses the CCS standard.





their way into other Kia, including 'take a break' and high beam assist. A 'utility' mode even allows the car's electrics to be used without enabling the powertrain – ideal for camping trips.

TBC: So, yes, the e-Niro is all very orthodox; that is until you examine the powertrain. The Kia gets a 204hp motor that propels the front wheels. The motor's power output boosts the Kia e-Niro's athleticism well above the current plug-in and hybrid Niro models. What's more, once the substantial surge of 395Nm torque is taken into consideration, the car feels livelier than many 'warm' family-hatchbacks. There's even enough grunt to get a squeal from the front tyres, as I found out when putting my foot down to escape Seoul's traffic.

JM: The e-Niro is currently Kia's hottest C-segment car – so in the same way that customers are prepared to pay a premium for cars badged 'M Sport' or 'AMG', Kia's electric range can be looked at in a similar light. However, all that torque makes the e-Niro blisteringly quick off the line, but it's less impressive in corners where its heft and height don't result in excellent driving physics, and despite Kia making the steering more direct than the hybrid Niro. That said, it's not

half bad compared to other C-segment SUVs and the added stiffness for the electrics make it better than the hybrid Niros.

TBC: What about the all-important range then? Well, Kia claims that the e-Niro can manage 282 miles (WLTP) on one charge. More impressively, the official figure is higher when driving around town at 382 miles. That means many e-Niro drivers will only need to charge up once a week - at most.

JM: In practice, drive hard and you'll still see more than 230 miles with ease. If you never venture beyond the limits of London's 20mph zone, there's no reason why the e-Niro won't regularly see well over 300 miles. During my time with the car, I managed a very healthy 5.5 miles/kWh when travelling about town, anticipating traffic ahead and using the coasting mode, so the WLTP figures are about right. What's more, the battery is liquid cooled which should mean all-year round range is reasonably constant, unlike air-cooled rivals like the Leaf. There's also an Eco+ mode that limits power and top speed to offer even more range when needed.

TBC: Granted, the topping up process isn't as straightforward as a quick fill up at the pumps, but connect the Kia to a 100kW



quick charger and less than an hour later (54 minutes) you'll have charged the battery pack from 0-80%. That's enough energy for the e-Niro to cover between 226 and nearly 300 miles, depending on how you drive it.

JM: Due to the larger than average pack, it's well worth taking up Kia's offer of a Pod Point 7kW charger that'll keep the battery topped up overnight. Stick to a three-pin plug and the car will take around 29 hours to charge from zero to maximum. It's also worth investigating specialist electric car energy tariffs from the likes of Ecotricity and Octopus Energy that'll significantly reduce the cost of charging the car at home.

TBC: There are very few drawbacks with the e-Niro. Okay, it can understeer a bit due to the weighty battery-pack, but then this pack gives the Kia a low centre of gravity. So, no, there really aren't any significant gripes from me. At the end of the day, the all-new e-Niro is a no-nonsense five-door family crossover that makes electric car ownership more appealing than ever.

JM: The e-Niro is a car that'll make people think twice before blindly buying a diesel. The figures stack up on paper and more importantly in the real world too. Only Kia's current supply issues can really hold it back from being a true sales success. However, it's a shame the UK won't be getting the smaller 39kWh variant, as that would really put the car amongst the pigeons. Nevertheless, and even with lengthy waiting times, the e-Niro is well worth a look before committing to other popular EVs. **AV**

