Road beat: Cadenza – best Kia on the market



The Kia Cadenza elevates the carmaker’s choices to a higher level. Photos/Larry Weitzman

By Larry Weitzman

When Kia came to the United States about 20 years ago, its only product was a no frills compact called the Sephia priced for thousands less than brand T or H. Now they have gone not just one better, but perhaps infinitely better with the all new Cadenza, and no I am not talking about a piece of office furniture to hold supplies.

Kia makes some great cars such as its highly rated and great looking Optima or its Sorento crossover, but this new Cadenza is their best effort yet and it’s no wonder why Kia has become

one of the fastest growing car brands in the United States. Although its very shapely body is only a 195 inches long and only 73 inches wide (that’s 5 inches longer and an inch wider than your average midsize), it meets the EPA’s definition of a large car with a total interior volume of 123 cubic feet including 16 cubes of trunk.

And what an interior it is. Done in soft nappa leather, the front seats are simply sublime with enough rear seat room to handle the front line of the Sacramento Kings. Even the outboard rear seats are heated with the luxury package or in the limited model. Everything you touch is either soft touch or wood and it exudes luxury. In the tested limited model, there are no options, everything is standard including blind spot detection, lane warning departure, adaptive xenon HID headlights and the best laser (smart) cruise control ever encountered by the Road Beat. It is so quiet and noises are so muted, it feels more like a well-appointed bank vault.



Specifications

Price (with destination)
$35,900 to about $43,200
Engine
3.3L DOHC, 24 valve V-6 293 hp A 6,400 rpm
255 ft.-lbs. of torque @ 5,200 rpm
Transmission
Six speed torque converter

automatic with paddle shifters
Configuration
Transversely mounted front engine/front wheel drive
Dimensions
Wheelbase 112.0 inches
Length 195.5 inches
Width 72.8 inches
Height 58.1 inches
Track (f/r) 63.0/63.0 inches
Weight (18”/19” wheels) 3,668/3792 pounds
Ground clearance 5.4 inches
Fuel Capacity 18.5 gallons
Cabin interior volume 106.8 cubic feet
Trunk volume 15.9 cubic feet
Turning circle 36.5 feet
Steering lock to lock 2.9 turns
Wheels (std/opt) 18X7.5/19X8.5 inch alloys
Tires (std/opt) 245/45X18/245/40X19 inch radials
Performance
0-60 mph 6.34 seconds
50-70 mph 3.20 seco9nds
50-70 mph uphill 4.42 seconds
Top speed Way beyond sanity
Fuel economy EPA rated at 19/28/22 mpg city/highway/combined. Expect 33 mpg in highway driving at legal speeds and

25-26 mpg overall in suburban/rural driving.

The exterior is also strikingly beautiful with, soft well proportioned shapes and lines. Perhaps the only improvement could be made to the rear quarter window line that has an upsweep to it. A more level lower line might look better.

Under the hood is a silky, advanced 3.3L liter DOHC 24 valve V-6 that pumps out 293 hp at 6,400 rpm and peak torque of 255 pounds at 5,200 rpm meaning it is also making about 255 hp at that same rpm (one pound of torque equals one hp at 5,252 rpm). Even with a stratospheric 12:1 compression ratio, because of its advanced direct cylinder fuel injection and other design features it runs fine on regular gasoline. That power gets to the front wheels through a very smooth six speed auto cog swapper and it provides superb performance. Zero to 60 mph arrives in a near world class time of 6.34 seconds. And that was with having to modulate the throttle to prevent too much wheel spin (traction control was switched off). Passing times show the same moxie with a simulated 50-70 mph acceleration time of 3.20 seconds and the same run up a six percent grade only slowing that time to 4.42 seconds. And because of its quiet and unruffled nature, it goes about its business almost unfettered.

Fuel economy is another bonus. While the EPA rates the Cadenza at 19/28/22 mpg city/highway/combined, it averaged 26 mpg overall and achieved 33 mpg on a level highway at 70 mph. Even during performance testing it never averaged below 21 mpg. You can call it guiltless luxury. Another positive is the Cadenza’s large 18.5 gallon fuel tank which equates to an over 500 mile cruising range.

All four corners are suspended independently, MacPherson struts up front and a multilink set up in the rear with coils all around and stab bars at both ends. A quick electric rack (2.9 turns lock to lock) performs the direction changes and

the whole set up is well balanced and provides responsive, powerful cornering. Helping in the direction changes are 245/40 series rubber mounted on wide19 x 8.5 inch alloys. Standard rubber is 245/45 x 18 on 18 x 7.5 inch alloys that will also provide good cornering power. What I found surprising was how the Cadenza's cornering attitude remained flat when pushed hard in the twisties despite of a curb weight of nearly 3,800 pounds. Turn in is crisp and understeer is mild. It is a pleasure to drive aggressively. Turning circle is a tight 36 feet.

While the handling is very good, so is the ride quality and it is exceedingly quiet, so quiet you have to think in a whisper. There is little to no float while remaining supple and very compliant even over the smallest imperfections. On the highway it is solid like the aforementioned bank vault. At 70 mph there is no wind or road noise with the engine spinning an inaudible, low 2,000 rpm.

Braking is done by large four-wheel discs (front ventilated) that can arrest forward progress from 40 mph in a short 42 feet under perfect control. Besides all the safety acronyms you would expect such as ESC (electronic stability control), TCS (traction control), ABS, EBD, HAC (hill-start assist control), TPMS (tire pressure monitoring system), BAC (brake assist control), Kia adds a second stability control called VSM also know as vehicle stability management. It is a veritable alphabet soup of safety. Special mention needs to be made for the excellent high and low beam xenon HID active front lighting system that turns night into day which is especially appreciated when driving on dark rural roads. And if that doesn't float your boat, the eight air bags will.



The Cadenza is roomy.

Inside besides the wonderful luxurious interior which would be fit for cars costing thousands more in design, fit, finish and materials, is a superb dash with a seven inch TFT screen which appears as a large, centered analog speedo and data information center. The left flanking tach and right side ancillary gauges are analog with actual dials. But it is the way the information panel changes screens which is so cool like they are real pages flipping up and down. Then there is the gear indicator that acts like a rotating barrel indicator and appears to rotate horizontally and vertically depending whether going from park to drive (vertically) or going from sixth gear to fifth gear using the paddle shifter (horizontally). It is fun to see it work and it is the slickest system I have ever seen.

The standard sound/nav system is one of the best and easiest to use. Even the HVAC is controlled by separate large stylish buttons while the sound system has electronic knobs for tuning and volume although the knobs could be a bit larger.

Cargo volume is a very large 16 cubic feet, but while the trunk hinges are protected, they do intrude a bit. Rear seats do fold to expand the cargo space.

Pricing starts at $35,100 for the premium model plus $800 for the boat ride from Korea. There is only one option package called the Luxury package which stickers at $3,150. My limited (denoted by SXL on the trunk deck) comes with no options, or

in other words, everything is standard, lists for $42,400 plus the destination. My vote would be for the premium plus the luxury package. It’s a lot of car for under $40 large. Even the standard premium car, which leaves little to be desired, is a bargain in this class of cars.

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.