

# Road Beat: Kia Niro, a high mileage crossover hybrid



The Kia Niro is part of the crossing crossover market.  
Photos/Larry Weitzman

**By Larry Weitzman**

Kia has become a major player in the American auto market. In a little more than 20 years Kia has total U.S. sales exceeding 645,000 cars a year, more than Volkswagen/Audi by 100,000 units. With that in mind, Kia now brings to market its first car designed from the ground up as a hybrid, the Kia Niro.

Kia Niro first caught the Road Beat's attention when about five months ago it set a Guinness World Record title by driving from New York City to Los Angeles, a total of 3,715 miles on just 48.1 gallons of gas, averaging a remarkable 76.6

mpg or 4.1 tanks of fuel (Niro holds 11.9 gallons).

Will it do that in real life? Sure, if you hyper mileage, but in normal driving 45 mpg might be more the norm from my top of the line Touring model. The model used in the mileage test was a very well-equipped EX, which achieves, according to the EPA numbers, about six more mpg and costs about \$4,000 less than my loaded Touring version.

As a crossover, Kia Niro enters perhaps the fastest growing segment of the market. It's take no chances as looks are very attractive with excellent proportions in its two-box design. The front end uses Kia's trademark grille and has some mild aggression.

With a length of just 172 inches, Niro is almost a subcompact riding on a long 106-inch wheelbase. It's wide at 71 inches and stands a reasonable 61 inches tall. Interior volume totals almost 100 cubic feet.



### **Specifications**

**Price** \$22,890 to about \$30,545

**Engine** 1.6L direct injected inline four cylinder 104 hp @ 5,700 rpm  
109 lb.-ft. of torque @ 4,000 rpm

**Electric Power system**

Electric motor 43 hp

125 lb.-ft. of torque

Battery

Capacity 1.56 kWh

Maximum output 42 kW

Combined output 139 hp

195 lb.-ft. of torque

### **Transmission**

Six-speed dual clutch  
automatic manual

### **Configuration**

Transverse front  
engine/front wheel drive

### **Dimensions**

Wheelbase 106.3 inches

Length 171.5 inches

Width 71.1 inches

Height 60.8 inches

Track (f/r) 61.2/61.8 inches

Ground clearance 6.3 inches

Fuel capacity 11.9 gallons

Luggage capacity, rear seats  
up/down 19.4, 54.5 cubic feet

Cabin volume 97.1 cubic feet

Steering lock to lock 2.85  
turns

Turning circle 34.8 feet

Weight 3,274

GVWR 4,255

Payload 981 pounds

Tires 225/45X18

### **Performance**

0-60 mph 9.22 seconds

50-70 mph 5.14 seconds

50-70mph uphill 9.65 seconds

Top speed Well into triple  
digits

Fuel economy EPA rated 46/40/43 mpg city/highway combined. Expect 45 mpg in rural, suburban driving and 43 mpg on the highway at legal speeds.

Under his short hood are two powerplants. First a 1.6L direct injected petrol powerplant that produces 104 hp at 5,700 rpm with 109 pounds of twist at 4,000 rpm. Sandwiched between the engine and tranny is a 43 hp electric motor powered by a 1.56 kWh L-I battery packed under the rear seat that can put out 56 hp but because of different rpms the maximum combined output of the combined power system is 139 hp.

Performance is still best in (compact class) with a 0-60 mph time of 9.27 seconds. Passing times from 50-70 mph are 5.14 seconds and 9.64 seconds on level ground and a 6 percent grade, respectively. It actually feels more powerful especially at speeds below 60 mph. Helping in this responsiveness is the six-speed dual clutch automated manual transmission which has a sport mode which allows the driver to totally control shifting or leave it in "D" which is "ECO" mode and let the tranny make all the decisions using a more aggressive shifting algorithm which means up shifting at lower rpms to improve fuel economy.

Fuel economy is EPA rated in the Touring at 46/40/43 mpg city/highway/combined. However, for some unexplained reason the FE, LX and EX models achieve anywhere from about 6 to 9 more mpg according to the EPA. But real-life numbers are about 10 percent better than the EPA numbers for the Touring with a constant 70 mph fuel economy showing 42.8 mpg. In a 267 mile, round trip from Placerville to Reno via highway 50 and 395 the Niro averaged 43.6 mpg and the run from Carson City to Placerville averaged 53.7 mpg. Good fuel economy but not great as there are some conventional compacts that achieve nearly

the same fuel economy like the Niro's sibling, the Elantra Eco. However, while those conventionals exceed the Niro's highway fuel economy, the Niro scores much better in urban, suburban runs. A bigger fuel capacity would also be welcomed.

Suspension is state of the art four-wheel independent and with the Touring edition you get 18 inch alloys shod with some meaty 225/45 series rubber. When you add to that an electric power steering rack that is a quick 2.85 turns lock to lock and a tight turning circle of just 34.8 feet you have the ingredients of good handling and a quality ride. Niro delivers on both counts.

Body roll is well controlled and grip is tenacious making the Niro quite surprising, secure, safe as well as fun when the road bends. Ride is also compliant and well controlled. In pure electric, which the Niro does often, it becomes super quiet. About the only intrusion to the otherwise serene cabin is some tire noise on coarse roads.

Four-wheel disc brakes (fronts are ventilated) are at the corners with all the safety acronyms. In addition, Niro has regenerative braking which is seamless. When on downgrades, a downshift will accelerate the recharging of the L-I battery pack and can be easily used to control downhill speed.

Inside the touring edition is a perforated leather interior. Seats feel a bit firm at first, but after some time in the saddles, the firmness is replaced by long lasting supportive comfort. As with most hybrids instrumentation is complete sans a tachometer which is replaced by a power meter telling you the efficiency of your operation of the power system. I rather have a tach and watch the graphic of what's happening in the info pack centered between the speedo/power meter.

The center stack uses a partial touch screen, which I found somewhat difficult to use as opposed to knobs and buttons. In case of an investigation, they would find fingerprints galore.

There is plenty of rear seat legroom and with the seats folded flat there about 55 cubic feet of cargo space and when up there still remains nearly twenty cubic feet of luggage capacity or about the size of a Town Car trunk, but better shaped.

Pricing for the high fuel economy, well-equipped FE starts at just \$22,890 plus \$895 for the boat from Hwaseong, South Korea to \$30, 545 for my loaded tester, a Niro Touring including destination. Another great car from Kia.

*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.*