

Five quality Korean cars

By  Ané Theron

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Korean cars are more distinguished than ever. As life in SA becomes more and more expensive, these five quality cars are worthy of your attention, if you're thinking of foregoing the expensive German luxury brands.

Kia Soul 1.6 CRDi Start



The highly underrated Kia Soul is not exactly a top-seller in South Africa, but after a 7000km on a marathon-roadtrip to raise funds for the [Seven7Drive](#) for kids with cancer, I would love to have one in my garage.

The Soul is as capable as it is quirky, and with a high level of standard specification, super-supportive seats, fantastic fuel economy of around 5.8 litres per 100km, and ample rear legroom for tall adults, this compact crossover is a practical choice that will also appeal to those with a non-conformist nature.

Despite being the entry-level diesel model, the Soul 1.6 CRDi Start has advanced safety features such as a rearview camera, six airbags and stability/traction control (R329,995).

Hyundai Elantra 1.6 Turbo Elite Sport



While we'd all love to have an Audi A4 or BMW 3 Series decorating our driveway, our budgets often fall short. The good news is that the new Elantra, specifically the Sport derivative, is light-years ahead of its predecessor. The dull steering from the previous incarnation has now made way for a direct, well-weighted and responsive steering feel, and the Elantra's overall handling exceeds expectations.

The 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engine is vivacious, yet 800km on a single tank is still easily attainable on the combined cycle. Steering-mounted flappy paddles come in handy for driving enthusiasts who like to be in complete control of gear changes. My test model came with luxurious mulberry (man-made) leather seats, adding a considerable amount of sex-appeal. Considering the price of R399,900 and powerful 150 kW performance, the Elantra Sport is hardly something you'd settle for, just because you can't afford a Jaguar or a Merc.

Kia Rio Hatch 1.4 Tec



After getting lost en route to a remote venue, the new Kia Rio showed me the pure gold it was made of when I had to make an abrupt stop on a nasty gravel road, as a goat ran across the road on a whim. Throw in a couple of unmarked ditches (on above-mentioned road), a curvy mountain pass and some heavy N1-traffic, and the Rio had plenty of opportunities to impress me. Apart from the road noise in the cabin (partly to blame are the large 17-inch wheels), there isn't much to fault, and the Rio remains a firm favourite with South African car buyers.



The funky, #FunHunter Nissan Micra Active

Ilse van den Berg 2 Oct 2017



The Kia Rio Hatch 1.4 Tec (R274,995) has Android Auto and Apple CarPlay (with screen mirroring) for fuss-free connectivity. Even after pushing the Rio rather hard in some places, fuel economy never crossed the 7.3 litres per 100km mark. Drive sensibly, and you may get it as low as 5.8. Considering that prices for the Audi A3 hatch start at R409,500 for the three-door 1.0TFSI Auto, the Rio's a much more affordable replacement with all the spec you may need - at no extra cost.

Kia Picanto 1.2 Smart Manual



There's a usually a good reason a car is selected as a WesBank COTY finalist, and the new Picanto has made the grade as one of the top ten for 2018. With a fairly large improvement on passenger space, luggage volume and overall trim quality, the perky Picanto has its sights set on A-segment heavyweights such as the VW Up!, Toyota Aygo, Renault Sandero and volume-selling Hyundai Grand i10, another great Korean contender.

From a design perspective, the Picanto challenges its rivals significantly with its fresh little face and cheeky demeanour. The range-topping Picanto 1.2 Smart Manual costs R195,995 and has everything but the kitchen sink, such as a large new touchscreen infotainment system (with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay), LED daytime running lights, electrically folding (heated) side-mirrors, aluminium pedals, rear parking sensors, a rear-view camera, 15-inch alloys and two-tone leather seats. However, three out of the 11 Picantos lack ABS and only have a driver airbag, so I would recommend spending just a dash more to avoid the entry-level 'Start' derivatives.

Hyundai Tucson 1.7 CRDi



When you lower your behind onto the Tucson driver's seat and serenely pull out of your driveway, the word 'refinement' immediately springs to mind. There's an all-round feeling of class and luxury, and it's easy to see why the Tucson is such a volume seller in South Africa. The Tucson was also a 2017 WesBank COTY finalist.

Pick the entry-level diesel Tucson 1.7 CRDi (pictured here, R449,900) and you won't have to stop to refuel very often - over 1100 km on one tank is not unheard of. Plus, you'll have slightly more functional wheels that won't mind a spot of off-roading. In need of something slightly smaller? The Hyundai Creta (from R324,900) is an excellent buy, too.

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course.

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