

Kia Sportage gains EXtra appeal

By  Henrie Geyser

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South African roads are densely populated by family-hauling SUVs, cross-overs, station wagons and MPVS which is hardly surprising, considering that there are about 650 variants on the market varying in price from R145,000 all the way up to over R4-million.



The practicality, multi-tasking and family-orientated characteristics of these vehicles are probably the main attractions that drive their popularity but there is also a good case to be made for their snob appeal and perceived high-riding safety.

Whatever reasons though, *Seffriken*s love their work-and-play wagons and over the years several brands have built up strong fan clubs, particularly in the R300,000 to R600,000 price range.



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The brands represent a real United Nations of manufacturers stretching from China, Japan and India to England, Germany, Italy and France and further afield. South Korea has been strengthening its grip with the ever-growing presence of the family-connected Hyundai and Kia brands which, between them, have about 50 models to choose from in the above segments.

I recently spent a week zipping around the Western Cape in a Kia Sportage 2.0 Ex Plus which boasts a strong presence in the above price range against talented competitors such as Hyundai Tucson, Honda CR-V, Toyota RAV4, Ford Kuga, and Volkswagen Tiguan.



Kia has boosted the Sportage range with the addition of seven new or enhanced models which included our test vehicle. I am quite a fan of Korean cars because of their build-quality, reliability, competitive pricing, pleasant drive, comfort, and outstanding back-up which, in our test vehicle, is a purchase price-inclusive five-year/90,000km service plan.

Since the upgrade injection, the Ex and Ex Plus models have been particularly popular, especially the oil-burners. The 2.0-litre petrol Ex Plus is a new addition to the Sportage range and it slots neatly into the middle of the 12-model Sportage lineup.



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Like the entire range, the Ex Plus is generously equipped with a rich array of smart features including LED daytime running lights, automatic headlight control, rear park distance control, Bluetooth connectivity, and steering wheel-mounted remote controls.

But the EX Plus ups the game even further with the addition of electric parking brake, front park distance control, rain-sensing wipers, cruise control, leather upholstery, stop-start button, leather-wrapped steering wheel and gear knob, plus electric folding side mirrors with indicators.

Added eye candy includes the addition of 19-inch alloys, while the interior gains electric front seats and a seven-inch touchscreen with integrated satellite navigation.

Acres of leg- and shoulder space

The cabin oozes perceived quality, comfort, and class with acres of leg- and shoulder space, even for the back-seat passengers. The loading bay is spacious enough to swallow all the needs of a family holiday, but the one thing lacking is

press-button functionality on the rather large and heavy luggage gate.

In spite of its rather imposing presence, the EX Plus is quite perky, thanks to its smooth six-speed automatic transmission which is linked to 2.0-litre petrol-engine that kicks out 114kW and 192Nm – a combination that is good enough for a 0-100km/h sprint time of 11.1sec and a top speed of 181km/h.



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However, both the sprint time and top speed are bettered by the more expensive AWD diesel-powered Ex Plus which has a sprint time of 9.3 sec and a top speed of 201km/h. The diesel is also more frugal, with a claimed consumption of 8.2-litres compared to the petrol model's 9.7-litres.

SUVs are inclined to be a tad top-heavy when pushed through the corners although our test car handled very pleasantly at cruising pace, even on a snaking coastal road. I liked the well-insulated living quarters, the touch-screen navigation/sound system and the high-riding, fully-adjustable driver's seat and steering wheel configuration.

The suspension is a fine balance between tarmac handling and gravel coping - firm, but not taut, and gentle without being wafting. The steering is also fairly direct and parking is a doddle, particularly with the able guidance of park control. All in all, this new Sportage ticks most of the right boxes.

The Sportage range has carved a pleasant niche for itself in the local SUV market and the addition of the EX and EX Plus variants are sure to give it an EXtra boost.

The Sportage 2.0 EX Plus six-speed automatic is priced at R459,995.

ABOUT HENRIE GEYSER

Henrie Geyser joined the online publishing industry through iafrica.com where he worked for five years as news editor and editor. He now freelances for a variety of print and online publications, on the subjects of cars, food, and travel, among others; and is a member of the South African Guild of Motoring Journalists. henrieg@iafrica.com

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