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Kia's 'Big Little Car' – New Rio First Impressions

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(Note from Kim: Wheels-Alive is deliberately covering the new Rio from two different perspectives, so, purely in alphabetical order we will start with David's First Impressions of the newcomer, and to read Keith Ward's equally insightful thoughts, please click [HERE](#)).

Known as Kia's 'big little car' the Rio Supermini has gone through three generations and the fourth incarnation is with us now priced from £11,995 on the road.

Globally the Rio has been Kia's best selling model range with annual sales of around



475,000 units. But in the UK the Rio has been outsold by Kia's Sportage mid-sized SUV/Crossover and the Cee'd C-segment models. In 2015, the Rio's last full year of sales over 12,000 of them were sold in the UK, 70% of them to retail customers with fleet users taking 30%.

With the new Rio arriving in UK dealerships from 1 February, Matthew Stevens, Kia UK's product manager for Rio, said the target is at least 9,000 sales but they expect it to be closer to 12,000 registrations this year.



The Rio's Supermini competitors include the best selling Ford Fiesta, the VW Polo, Vauxhall Corsa, Honda Jazz, Peugeot 208, new Citroen C3, new Nissan Micra and even Kia's parent company's Hyundai i20 range. The Supermini sector remains the largest in the UK's new car market with 872,936 registrations last year. However that was a fall of 5.8% over 2015



as customers either down-sized to City Cars whose sales increased by 9%, or most likely moved to SUV/Crossover models where UK sales increased by 23%.

This time around the fourth generation Kia Rio is available only as a five door hatchback. Kia say the demand for Rio three door hatchbacks was minuscule as it was most often bought as the only car in the family and buyers want the convenience and access of five doors.

Kia's 1.0 litre T-GDi (Turbocharged Gasoline Direct-injection) three cylinder engines are offered in the Rio for the first time and head a seven-strong powertrain line-up which shows improvements in fuel efficiency and CO₂ emissions over the outgoing Rio.



The T-GDi units join revised versions of Kia's 1.25 litre and 1.4 litre petrol engines, and two



versions of the European-designed and European-built 1.4 litre CRDi turbodiesel.

The 1.0 litre T-GDi engine is available with either 99 or 118 bhp, in both cases with 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque across a wide rev band, starting at only 1,500 rpm. The lesser-powered version has fuel consumption and CO2 emissions of 62.8 mpg and 102 g/km, while the 118 bhp version is not far behind, with 60.1 mpg and 107 g/km. Both are capable of more than 50 mpg in city driving. The respective 0-60 mph acceleration times are 10.3 and 9.8 seconds, and both versions have a top speed of at least 115mph.

The fuel economy champion of the new Rio range is the lesser-powered, 76 bhp 1.4 litre diesel, a new option in Rio. Both 1.4 litre diesels produce a healthy 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) of torque and have CO2 emissions below 100 g/km - 92 g/km and 98g/km respectively - while fuel consumption figures are 80.7 and 74.3 mpg. The 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) of torque is available from just 1,500 rpm, giving responsive acceleration from 0-60 mph in either 13.5 or 11.6 seconds, with top speeds of more than 100 mph.

The 1.25 litre petrol engine develops 83 bhp and 121 Nm (89 lb.ft) of torque, and has fuel economy and CO2 emissions of 58.8 mpg and 109 g/km. This easy-going entry-level power unit is ideally suited to urban driving, but is far from out of its depth at highway speeds. It can accelerate from 0-60 mph in 12.5 seconds on the way to a top speed of 107 mph.

The final option is a new-to-Rio multi-point injection petrol unit with a capacity of 1.4 litres and power and torque outputs of 98 bhp and 133 Nm (98 lb.ft). Economy is 56.5 mpg, with CO2 emissions of 114 g/km. The 0-60 mph and top speed figures are 11.8 seconds and 108 mph.

This engine is also available with a four-speed automatic gearbox for the convenience of drivers who spend most of their time in heavy traffic or who have physical disabilities which prevent them from driving a manual. In this configuration, economy and CO2 emissions are 46.3 mpg and 140 g/km, while the performance figures are 0-60 mph in 13.4 seconds and a top speed of 103 mph.



All manual versions of the new Rio have Kia's Intelligent Stop & Go (ISG) engine stop-start system to eliminate tailpipe emissions and fuel consumption while stationary in traffic.

Kia expects that 83% of UK customers to choose a petrol engine with the 1.25 unit accounting for 43% of sales and the new 1.0 T-GDi petrol engines taking 21%.

When it comes to what level of specification to choose in the 10 model range there are three mainstream levels badged 1, 2 and 3 in familiar Kia style. In addition there is a limited-run First Edition model as the pinnacle of the range, priced at £17,445. Kia expects 60% of UK buyers will go for the grade '2' followed by the price-led grade '1' at 21%, grade '3' with 17% and just 2% opting for the 'First Edition' grade due to it only being offered with the 1.0-litre T-GDi 118 bhp petrol engine.

Grade 1 specification, priced from £11,995, includes as standard air conditioning, front electric windows, remote locking, electrically adjustable heated door mirrors, a 3.8-inch display screen, Bluetooth, automatic light control, bi-function projection headlamps and cornering lights and LED daytime running lights. A four-speaker audio system is standard, while safety provisions include Electronic Stability Control, Vehicle Stability Management and Hill-start Assist Control.

Grade 2, priced from £13,745, additions include 15-inch alloy wheels, a leather-trimmed steering wheel and gearlever, electric windows at the rear, DAB radio, a 5-inch colour display screen, a reversing camera and rear parking sensors, cruise control with a speed limiter and Autonomous Emergency Braking and Lane Departure Warning systems.

Additional features on Grade 3, which starts at £16,295, include 16-inch alloy wheels, automatic air conditioning, black faux leather upholstery, a 7-inch display screen, heated front seats and a heated steering wheel, rain-sensing front wipers, satellite navigation, Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connectivity and Bluetooth with voice recognition.

The First Edition version adds 17-inch alloys, a smart key entry system and engine start/stop button, stainless steel pedals, black and red faux leather upholstery and LED rear lights.



Kia said this week in the UK that they are expecting the 1.25 petrol manual grade '2' model, priced at £13,745 to be the best-selling single version of the all-new Rio.

In common with all Kia models the Rio comes with a seven-year/100,000-mile warranty covering all labour and parts except those subject to normal wear and tear.



The latest Rio is the largest and most spacious to date, and the extra interior space was immediately evident on my first visit to the car. It looks better than most of its Supermini sector competitors for rear seat passenger space. The improved interior looks a good choice for one car families or most likely older 'empty nesters' as the average age of Rio customers has been in the over 50s category.

The kerb appeal looks better with its longer bonnet and a more refined front end treatment



of the brand's 'tiger-nose' grille. With four passenger doors access to the rear seats has been improved. At the rear is a modest 325 litre (11.48 cu.ft) boot but this expands to 980 litres (34.61 cu.ft) with the split rear seats folded.



Generally the interior looks functional and well laid out but there is a lot of hard plastic trim and the doors felt 'light' without that desirable expensive sounding 'clunk' when they were closed. Visibility was good in all directions.

Although the new Rio boasts a revised suspension layout for better ride quality I find it to still give a harsh ride, easily upset by impacts from potholes, and there was considerable road noise intrusion. The steering was predictable and overall the car felt balanced and best still with the diesel model where the extra engine weight gave it better directional stability.



At the UK media test driving event this week unfortunately the best selling models were yet to arrive from South Korea so we were limited to trying the new T-GDi three cylinder turbocharged petrol engines in 99 and 118 bhp forms plus the 1.4 CRDi 89 bhp turbodiesel and none of these had the expected best selling trim and equipment Grade '2' level.

Driving all three on the same route around the busy roads in the Thames Valley, taking in a section of the M40 motorway as well as Marlow and Henley-on-Thames traffic, I started off with the new 1.0 litre T-GDi 99bhp turbocharged three cylinder petrol engine which felt really lively and returned 44.2 mpg. The official Combined Cycle figure is 62.8 mpg. This unit develops a healthy 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,500 rpm so it is responsive for acceleration, taking 10.3 seconds from zero to 60 mph. Top speed is 115 mph. With CO2 emissions of 102 g/km VED road tax is currently £0 First Year rate and then £20 thereafter. Its only drawback was having a five-speed manual gearbox, a six-speed unit would have been better for motorway use. The price of this Grade '3' version was £16,295 but in Grade '2' spec form it is priced at an attractive £14,545 and it would be my model choice from the new range.

Next I moved to the 118 bhp version of the same engine and for now this only comes with the top 'First Edition' spec level priced at a high £17,445. The performance was noticeably higher getting to cruising speeds on a motorway. It has more power but the same amount of torque as the 99 bhp unit, but its biggest benefit was having six-speed gearbox. Top speed is 118 mph, zero to 60 mph takes 9.8 seconds, Combined Cycle fuel economy is 60.1 mpg and it returned 40.2 mpg on my test drive. The CO2 figure is 107 g/km so the VED costs are the same as the 99 bhp unit.

Lastly I got behind the wheel of the 1.4 CRDi 89 bhp four cylinder turbodiesel which also has a six-speed manual gearbox. To be honest this felt the best engine of all for overall use but it is unlikely to be that popular with retail customers due to the uncertain future of diesel powered cars. With its Grade '3' spec this version is priced at £17,245. Top speed is 108 mph and zero to 60 mph takes 11.6 seconds. Its big plus point, apart from providing more 'grunt' with a healthy 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, was the relaxed



motorway driving speeds thanks to the six-speed gearbox. My test drive real-life fuel economy was 57.3 mpg but that was still below the 74.3 mpg official figure. With CO2 emissions of a low 98 g/km, VED road tax currently costs nothing and the most likely customers - fleet users, will pay 19% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

VERDICT

The new Kia Rio is a decent, spacious, capable, well-equipped and reliable Supermini but it is not as accomplished and well rounded in the handling department as say a Ford Fiesta or with the interior quality of a VW Polo. It is better - but not the best in its class.

For: Grown up good exterior looks improves kerb appeal, significantly improved interior space especially for rear seat passengers, high specification, lively new 1.0 litre turbo petrol engines, low running costs, long warranty, Grade '2' spec is recommended as it reduces the price to £14,545.

Against: Poor ride quality, needs a 6-speed gearbox, low-rent hard plastic interior trim, choose the specification level carefully as Grade '3' and First Edition models look too expensive.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Kia Rio '3' 1.0 T-GDi, manual, 5-door Supermini. Price: £16,295.

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol with stop/start, 99 bhp, 171 Nm (126 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,500 rpm, 5-speed manual.

Performance: 115 mph, 0-60 mph 10.3 seconds.



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Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 62.8 mpg (44.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 102g/km, VED £0/£20, BIK company car tax currently 17%.

Insurance Group: Group 8.

Warranty: Seven years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,065 mm (14.34 ft), W 1,725 mm (5.66 ft), H 1,445 mm (4.74 ft), boot/load space 325-980 litres (11.48-34.61 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.