

Not just by the numbers By Joe Sage

Forte is a powerful word. Rooted in Latin and still used in modern Italian, it means strong or it means loud. This attractive compact can deliver what it should of either. Forte can mean large, heavy or substantial. The Kia Forte is neither large nor heavy, yet it proves to be substantial for such a small package.

An echo chamber among many autowriters loves to say "hatchbacks" are wonderful cars everybody should want if they were as savvy as that autowriter, yet that nobody in America will buy by that name—used more in Europe. We don't suffer their hangup, and regardless have a model here whose Mon-roney sticker calls it the Kia Forte SX 5-Door.

Kia Forte comes in three formats: a four-door sedan, simply called Forte; a two-door Forte Koupe; and this hatchback 5-Door, more widely known as the Kia Forte5.

The least costly of the Forte lineup is the sedan in LX trim, with a 1.8L engine and stick, starting at just \$15,890. The Forte5 skips LX and starts at a higher EX trim level and with a bigger (2.0L) engine, at \$19,690. An SX version has a more potent 1.6L turbo and starts at \$20,890 with a manual or \$21,890 with an automatic transmission, like ours here.

Forte5 slides neatly into a spot somewhere between volume econo-hatchbacks and the hottest of the tuner hot hatches.

The SX has several style and feature advantages over the base model. An upsize from 16-inch to 18-inch wheels really nails its appearance—this car will easily stand out from its base sedan cousin. Feature inclusions are extensive and on a par with vehicles twice its price. Ours added two more packages, but that's where a car of about \$20 grand became a car pushing \$30 grand.

Fuel mileage varies widely among body styles, engines and transmissions. A 39 MPG rating for the cheapest Forte sedan drops about 25 percent, to 29 MPG on our SX hatch. That's significant. However, its turbocharged power has climbed from 145 to 201 hp over that same model range, a 39 percent jump.

For frugality, the base sedan fills the bill. But this peppy, stylish and spacious Forte5 SX turbo will carry the day in every other way.

Forte: strong or loud. Our Forte5 SX is not dragstrip strong, but matches the 201 hp of a first-year Porsche Boxster and is a smooth, tight handler on a great two-lane. The only place it might be called loud is in its high level of driver connectedness, with a hair more road feel on rough pavement than some may like, though exactly what we would crave.

Our Graphite Steel over black leather sample was one of those cars we could happily take out on those two-lanes indefinitely. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE.....	1.6L turbo GDI 4-cylinder
TRANSMISSION	6-spd auto w Sportmatic & paddle
DRIVETRAIN	front-wheel drive
POWER/TORQUE	201 hp / 105 lb-ft
WEIGHT	3122 lb
PASSENGER CAPACITY	5 passengers / 98.2 cu.ft.
CARGO CAPACITY	32.2 cu.ft.
TURNING CIRCLE.....	34.8 ft
FUEL CAPACITY	13.2 gal
MPG.....	21/29/24 (city/hwy/comb)

FEATURES: Keyless entry/start, cruise, power windows/locks, leather tilt/tele wheel & shift knob, A/C, AM/FM/CD/MP3, SiriusXM, USB/aux, Bluetooth, UVO eServices, rear camera, LED DRLs and tail-lights, fog lights, power fold mirrors w turn signals and puddle lights, 60/40 split rear seat, cargo cover.

BASE PRICE	\$21,890
SX PREMIUM PACKAGE: Power tilt/slide sunroof, leather seat trim, power driver's seat w/memory, heated/vented front seats, heated steering wheel, heated outboard rear seats, auto-dim mirror w HomeLink.....	2300
SX TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE: Xenon HID headlights, dual-zone climate, HD radio, navigation w Sirius Traffic, meter cluster w 4.2" color LCD	1900
CARGO MAT	95
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	115
DESTINATION CHARGE:	800
TOTAL	\$27,100

