

Positioning statement

Accessible premium full-size front-driver BY JOE SAGE

Cadenz is a premium model in the Kia lineup, positioned above the hugely popular Optima midsize front-wheel-drive sedan, while above that sits the full-size, rear-drive luxury K900 sedan. Such was the positioning of the Cadenza at its launch that it was briefly Kia's new flagship. About half a year later, the K900 took that mantle.

Cadenz was introduced in 2013 as a 2014 model, and the K900 in 2014 as a 2015 model. Moving into premium territory in 2013 was a "bold move," says Kia corporate communications director James Bell, though within a year the lineup had fully transformed.

A key point driving Kia's move into premium and luxury over the past three years is that existing brands in those segments were moving down into traditional Kia territory. If they could share their premium/luxury badges with the entry segments, surely Kia could place its badge in the higher strata.

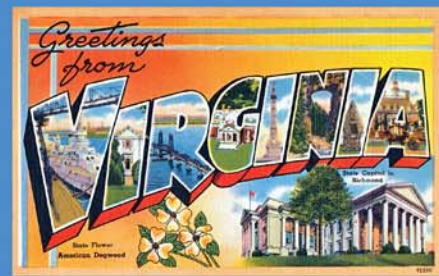
Kia Optima starts at about \$22 grand and tops out in its finest dress and performance level at about \$36 grand. Dealer demand, driv-

en by customer demand, had suggested a hunger for something just like Optima but a bit moreso in every regard—the seeds of Kia's growth into premium and luxury segments.

It has been a perfectly executed move. As Kia overall continues to grow exponentially fast, and as the brand has climbed to the top of customer satisfaction and quality charts, the breakthrough news of just two and three years ago today fits like a glove.

Kia Cadenz pricing is yet to be released, but the target is for a base model below \$32 grand, with the lineup topping out below \$44 grand. This is a range that starts almost 50 percent higher than Optima (the premium nature of Cadenz would not suggest as simple a model as the base Optima), but tops out just over 20 percent higher (as generous as Kia is with features and fitment, the top trim levels of both models are closer in content).

This closes the gap between Optima and K900, with the three together offering almost uninterrupted continuity over almost a three-fold price range.



Most importantly, it is crystal clear what you get with each. Kia has done very well in head-to-head matchups in every category. The premium segment is rich in competitors—European, American and Japanese—and KIA VP of product planning Orth Hedrick tells us they tested vehicles up to the \$75-80,000 range to benchmark the new Cadenz's feel. Thus Kia Cadenz comes with the features, style and build quality to take those established giants on. And Kia does it at a fraction of the price, with a 10-year, 100,000-mile drivetrain warranty, and with an ever-increasing trophy case full of top tier ratings and coveted awards to back it all up. (Among others, Kia is now number one in the prestigious JD Power Initial Quality Survey, having passed Honda, Porsche and, well, everyone else—the first traditionally non-premium brand to top the industry in 20 years.



Kia Motors America COO and executive vice president Michael Sprague proudly and rightly points out that Kia has become "a world class brand by every measure."

We flew to Virginia to meet the new 2017 Kia Cadenz and drive it through the beautiful and historic horse country of the Shenandoah Valley and Blue Ridge Mountains.

Virginia is an appropriate place for the Kia Cadenz launch. Home to our first and third presidents (who themselves were on hand for the event), Virginia is at the heart of the birth of our nation—itsself an elegant and durable concept, echoed by the Cadenz. Today, the region we visited is home to not only deep history, but to some of the finest competition and show horse country in the nation—echoed by Cadenz's premium status.

Cadenz's flavor of premium positioning steers away from stuffy, instead presenting

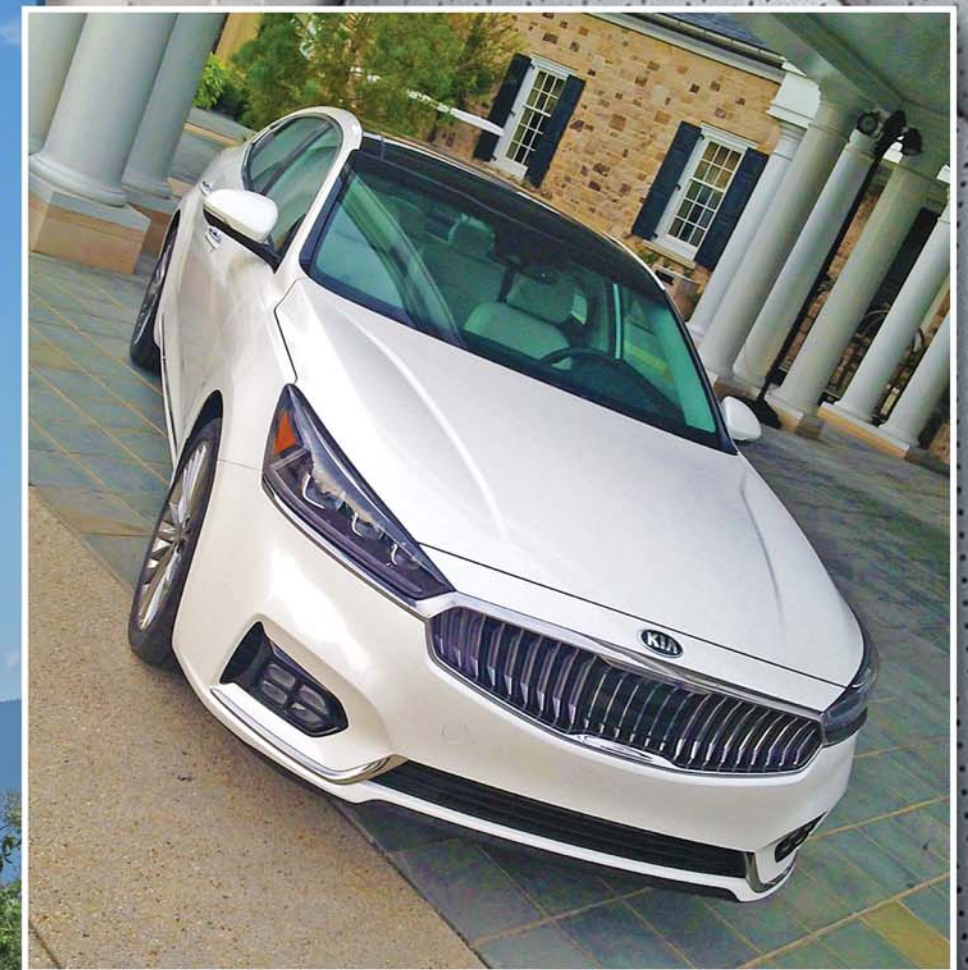
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(Top) We occasionally have some well-known politicians or government officials show up at events, but none with the gravitas of Virginia's native sons—Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and Father of our Country George Washington and an unexpectedly red-headed author of the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson.

Kia Cadenz's looks have evolved nicely. The brand is masterful at keeping a unified style while clearly distinguishing—and positioning—each vehicle in the lineup. A new iteration of the Tiger Nose grille (with a variant of the ice cube headlights of the newest Sportage) and a refined tail (with elegant exhaust tips and a neat chrome bar unifying taillights and rear deck spoiler) combine to make Cadenz all Kia, while clearly at a premium level.

SPECIFICATIONS	*OPTIMA	CADENZA	K900
ENGINE	1.6T, 2.4, 2.0T	3.3L V6	3.8L V6, 5.0L V8
DRIVETRAIN	FWD	FWD	RWD
HP	178-185-245	290	V6 311, V8 420
TORQUE (lb-ft)	195-178-260	253	V6 293, V8 376
TRANSMISSION	7-spd DC, 6-spd auto	8-spd auto	8-spd auto
BRAKES (vented/solid F/R)	12.0, 12.6 / 11.2	12.6 / 11.8	13.6, 14.2 / 12.4
WHEELS	6.5x16, 7.0x17, 7.5x18	7.5x18, 8.0x19	8.0x19, 9.0x19
FUEL CAPACITY (gal)	18.5	18.5	19.8
MPG (city/hwy/comb)	22/32/25 to 28/39/32	20/28/23	V6: 17/26/20 V8: 15/23/18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE (in)	191.1 / 110.4	195.7 / 112.4	200.6 / 119.9
WIDTH / HEIGHT (in)	73.2 / 57.7	73.6 / 57.9	74.8 / 58.5
TURNING CIRCLE (ft)	35.8	37.2	37.5
WEIGHT (lb)	3224-3594	3633-3799	4376-4610
SEATING	five	five	five
LEGROOM (F/R, in)	45.5 / 35.6	45.5 / 37.2	45.9 / 38.2
HEADROOM (F/R, in)	39.8 / 37.8	40.2 / 37.9	40.2 / 37.6
SHOULDER ROOM (F/R, in)	58.1 / 56.4	58.3 / 56.5	59.1 / 57.2
HIP ROOM (F/R, in)	56.0 / 56.0	56.5 / 56.3	55.9 / 55.7
PASSENGER VOL (cu.ft)	104.8	107.8	110.8
CARGO VOLUME (cu.ft)	15.9	16.0	15.9
TRIM LEVELS	LX 1.6T, LX, EX 2.4, SX, SXL 2.0T	Premium Technology Limited (SXL)	Premium V6, Luxury V6, Luxury V8
<small>* Optima Hybrid and Plug-In Hybrid also available; specs not included here.</small>			
BASE PRICE RANGE	\$22,140 to \$36,040	under \$32,000 to < \$44,000	\$49,000 to \$61,900

The 2017 Kia Cadenz pauses high above Virginia's beautiful Shenandoah River Valley.



itself as a “tailored athlete”—a persona equally appealing to the mid-50s or younger Millennial premium buyer.

For 2017, Cadenza has a longer wheelbase, track and overall width—an aggressive stance outside and limo-like roominess inside (with legroom the same as Optima in front, while approaching the luxury K900’s in the rear—see chart). The style’s strength shows up everywhere from a new concave grille (in two patterns) to a sharp “Z” shape appearing in the side of the taillights and another in the headlights, tying the whole thing together like a subtle lightning bolt.

With 290 hp and 253 lb-ft from its 3.3-liter V6, delivered through an 8-speed automatic (as on the K900) to its gorgeous 18- or 19-inch wheels, a suitable lightning bolt it is—and a lightning bolt that can stop on a dime, with 12.6-inch ventilated front disc brakes and 11.8-inch solid rears.

It’s a smooth, silent and strong lightning bolt, with a solid structure using double the prior generation’s advanced high-strength steel, six times the structural adhesives and three times the hot-stamped steel parts (all of which combine to better spread loads, for everything from a tighter ride and solid feel, to better crash performance). Cadenza’s electric power steering uses a column-mounted system and 32-bit processing to deliver the feel of a rack-mounted setup. Cadenza has elegant toughness inside and out, from its beautifully executed heated-cool leather seats with quilted bolsters, to sound-deadening glass, to a skin with 18 percent more dent-resistant doors.

All this style, elegance, power and road feel still bring you 28 mpg highway (and these numbers are, by the way, with the new, stricter EPA protocol just coming into play, which shifts all numbers down).

As always with Kia, it all comes at prices that challenge the competition even before others start charging for Kia inclusions as option costs—each Kia comes already bearing an extensive feature set, including advanced driving technologies and the latest creature comfort and utility technologies.

Whether you have thought of Kia when shopping the premium sedan segment to this point, or not, you will now. Prepare to have your knowledgebase transformed. ■

