

Sizable achievement

BY JOE SAGE

The first Kia Sportage—in 1993 globally, 1995 here, the brand's longest-running model—had a wheelbase just about a foot and a half longer than a Smart car. Today's new fifth generation (since 2021) has a wheelbase another foot and a half longer than that. Thirty years ago, the early Sportage seemed tiny, though looking back today, it seems less so, as sizes have migrated industry-wide. What that first little Sportage did have was a tall and spacious cabin for such a petite thing. And a generous

cabin is the very first thing that struck us as soon as we got inside the 2023 Sportage.

Larger in every key dimension than the gen-four Sportage, the interior benefits noticeably, bringing best-in-class claims for both passenger volume (at 168 cu.ft) and cargo volume (39.5)—also surpassing interior capacities for some vehicles in larger nominal categories. For families or adults, the new Sportage's 41.3-inch rear legroom is a standout.

The lineup is complex (see chart, lower right), with fully a dozen models, including first-ever Sportage X-Line and AWD X-Pro Series. Hybrid (HEV) and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) are also both new to Sportage. Of the twelve, three are hybrids and two are plug-in hybrids, one of which is also an X-Line.

All are available with AWD, with a few lower-to-mid trims also available as FWD. PHEVs—with extended EV, full gasoline or combined capabilities—are by far the priciest, putting the HEVs in a favorable range by comparison, given their high fuel economy. While ours is a lower-middle trim HEV with a 177-hp engine, the top turbo-hybrid HEV delivers 227 hp and 258 lb-ft of torque.

All-wheel-drive models ride an inch higher, with 8.3-inch ground clearance, have a locking center differential and torque vectoring, and include snow mode and downhill descent control. At an \$1800 differential against FWD where offered, that to us is the easiest decision point of all.

Sportage has maintained its identity through wild changes in size, features and styling. The new sheet metal is a significant change from the

bugeye headlights atop the hood on the prior one, though that generation had grown on us, too.

We had minor adventures with drive modes, accessible via a knob just below its rotary shift knob. By tweaking the dial, you can change modes without looking—eco-sport-smart-snow—though you may always be itching to steal a glance to confirm (and it always reverts to eco between uses). We loved sport mode on a freeway on-ramp, but also found that when we didn't think about it, and it just stayed in eco—for example on a long curvy, climb or descent on the Beeline Highway—it still delivered plenty satisfying power and shifts.

Steering is a standout, tracking with sports car accuracy, not wiggly or darty, outstanding for an electric unit in a front-drive-based vehicle.

We had our Sportage during a triple digit heat wave and found it took quite some time for the cabin to cool off, presumably an offshoot of the pure electric range of its hybrid system. Brakes were a little weaker than expected (oddly enough they give no specifications for these, other than boost).

Our midlevel trim, in Vesta Blue and with stylish 18-inch machined wheels (same on top trim), almost looked too elegant to take off pavement, but the sidewalls of its all-weather Goodyears are pretty healthy, and their promotional materials indicate a reasonable amount of off-pavement in pursuit of adventure spots, if not rock-crawling, is their intent. We took it on several miles of gravel road at a decent clip. None of its four modes seemed to describe such a drive, so we let the system decide. We did apply its center diff lock for some of the run, though in these conditions, it didn't make a noticeable difference. The takeaway is that it's basically ready for pretty much anything, without a lot of muss, fuss or consideration.

Some fifteen years ago, Kia's consumer build site included a "kiamatch.com" feature, a match-making quiz we ran through many possibilities at the time. One set of options—for a vehicle that's hardworking, dedicated to making you a success, full of adventure and style, and ready for any occasion—matched us with the Kia Sportage back then. It seems it easily still would today. ■

- Kia was ranked number one, for the second consecutive year, in the JD Power Vehicle Dependability Study measuring quality issues over the course of three years of ownership
- Kia Sportage has been recognized for the best new vehicle quality among Compact SUVs in the JD Power Initial Quality Study
- Still bearing hints of long-running Kia Tiger Nose front styling, the evolving design language direction is known as "Opposites United"



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Gwangju, South Korea
ENGINE / TRANSMISSION	.....Korea / Korea
PARTS CONTENT	.....90% S Korea / 1% US
GASOLINE ENGINE	.....1.6L turbo-4 16v DOHC CVVT GDI (dir.inj), alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....177 hp / 195 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....10.5:1
ELECTRIC MOTOR	.....perm magnet synch
HP/TORQUE	.....59.3 hp / 195 lb-ft
HYBRID STARTER/GEN	.....perm magnet synch
HP/TORQUE	.....17.4 hp / 31.9 lb-ft
HYBRID SYSTEM COMB.	.....transmission-mt ED
HP/TORQUE	.....227 hp / 258 lb-ft
HYB BATTERY SYSTEM	.....270V Li-Ion (pouch), 5.5Ah, 1.49kWh, 64.0kWh
WEIGHT	.....82.7 lb
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd auto, multi-plate wet friction clutch
DRIVETRAIN	.....AWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut; R: multi-link; gas shocks
STEERING	.....column-type motor driven
BRAKES	.....na
WHEELS / TIRES	.....7.5Jx18 alloy / 235/60R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....183.5 / 108.5 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....8.3 in
APPRCH / DEPART / RAMP	.....19.9 / 26.6 / 19.3°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....38.6 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....(w/sunrf) 37.8 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.4 / 41.3 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....34.5-39.5 / 65.4-73.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3732-3896 lb
GVWR	.....4949 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....1653 / w tr brakes 2000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....regular / 13.7 gal
MPG	.....38/38/38 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$30,990
EX PREMIUM PKG	.....pano sunroof w power shade, LED interior lighting, smart hands-free power liftgate, dual illum vanity mirrors.....1500
CARPETED FLOOR MATS	.....155
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1215
TOTAL	.....\$33,860

2023 KIA SPORTAGE LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
Sportage	LX.....\$25,990	\$27,790
	EX.....27,990	29,790
	X-Line.....30,790	
	SX.....31,490	33,290
	SX Prestige.....33,490	35,290
	X-Pro.....34,990	
	X-Pro Prestige.....36,790	
Sportage HEV	LX.....27,290	29,090
	EX.....30,990	
	SX-Prestige.....36,190	
Sportage PHEV	X-Line.....38,490	
	X-Line Prestige.....42,990	