

KONA V2.0: RECONCEIVED ELECTRIC-FIRST

BY JOE SAGE

We gave the first Hyundai Kona its shake-down drive at launch on the Kona Coast of Hawaii's Big Island in spring 2018. We have driven iterations a number of times since, back in Arizona, also in Georgia, and at comparo events in the Pacific Northwest and Texas (see photos at right). A full-EV version was added in 2019, a component of the company's accelerated electrification strategy to bring eleven new EVs to market globally by 2030. All have had great acclaim.

Kona in 2018 was conceived to fill the hottest growing segment of that moment—smaller than a compact crossover (in Hyundai's case Tucson, by far their top seller). Despite its smaller outside dimen-

sions, Kona has highly competitive interior volume.

The larger Palisade, the even smaller Venue and the Tucson-sized Santa Cruz pickup (sport adventure vehicle) also came to market since that time. While SUVs were 37 percent of brand sales in 2017, prior to Kona's launch, they are 73 percent today.

Time has both flown and stood still since then (with lockdowns and so on), and now we arrive at a new gen-two Kona for 2024. We first drove it briefly in Texas (see at right), soon flying to South Carolina for a formal introduction and first drive. Here, Hyundai product planning manager Melvyn Bautista confirmed the nature of this time span, terming the new Kona a "covid car," a global collaboration done against all odds from kitchens and

home offices in Korea, Germany and California.

The gen-two Kona comes in four powertrains—two gasoline and two electric. The basics including trims and prices are broken out in our chart at the end. Generation two of Hyundai Kona is a bit the same as gen one (referred to as "a continuing source of inspiration"), while at the same time different. The new Kona was conceived as an EV first—an uncommon approach—thus its internal combustion (ICE) powertrains are the adapted version.

Sales are sure to be strong for the ICE Kona for the time being—as we would be driving—but its full-electric basis makes it ready for the long haul.

Exterior styling includes rugged wheel arches and cladding (with far less cladding on the EV), along with Hyundai's crisp "parametric" side surface sculpting. The upscale EV influence brings "pixelated" details—tightly packed squares—to ICE now, too, seen in headlight and taillight bars.

The cabin has almost 42 inches of front legroom and close to 40 inches (38.2) in the rear. Seat thickness is reduced by 30 percent, with full comfort; most of the gain goes to the rear seats. Rare in the

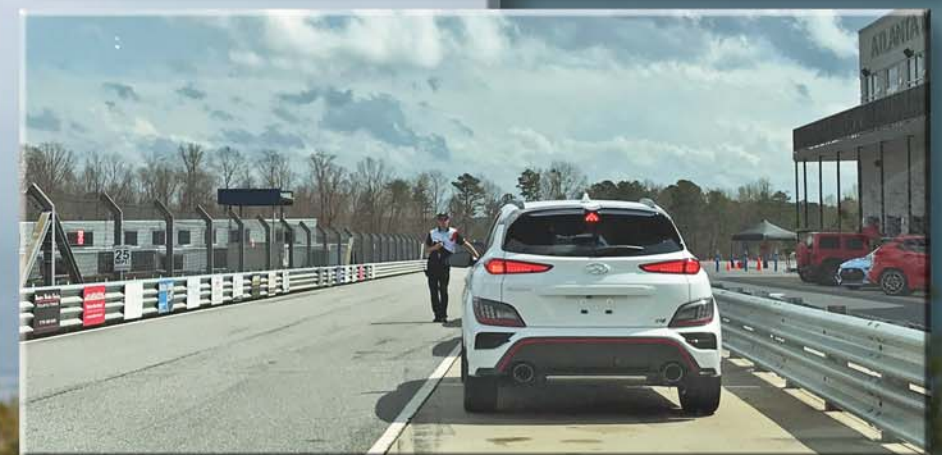
OUR HYUNDAI KONA NATIONAL TOUR OF SORTS: We've had quite a bit of time in the gen-one Kona. First was at its launch drive, on the Big Island of Hawaii (of course). We've had a couple for a week each back home in Arizona. We drove the Kona N on track at Atlanta Motorsports Park (and Kona back to Atlanta) last year. And we've had it in the mix at a few comparo events over the past five or six years. Our first run in gen two was a surprise—just a couple of weeks before our scheduled South Carolina launch drive, it was entered in the TAWA Texas Truck (and SUV-crossover) Rodeo comparo, where we took it for a short road drive.

segment are front seats that are both heated and cooled. Placement of controls and functions adds to the driver's commanding feel, in turn emphasizing cabin width. Clever storage and stash spots abound, along with a wireless charging pad and phone stand. The new Kona moves from Bluelink to new Bluelink+ connectivity, with basic functions now included at no further cost, for original or subsequent owners. An advanced plan is also included for new owners, with three months free then subscribable for subsequent owners.

With weights running just 3005 to 3505 pounds across the full lineup, fuel mileage is as high as 35 highway and 31 combined for the lower-powered engine, or 32 and 28 for the turbo, with fuel tank

(cont'd)

The generation one Kona had lively paint colors, in line with its Hawaiian vibe—Surf Blue, Sunset Orange, Lime Twist, its red even called Volcano, as well as a handsome dark grey and white. For gen two, ten new colors are available—three of these ICE-only, one EV-only, six shared by both—most of them tamer than before, with Neoteric Yellow and Soultronic Orange the liveliest. Shown here is Mirage Green.



capacity of 12.4 or 13.2 gallons, respectively.

As with gen one, towing is not recommended.

The sizing strategy has been a winner for Kona, as gen-one blew away original sales projections, rising to fifth-place seller in Hyundai's 14-model US lineup. Its sales have grown 24 percent year-over-year for the first three quarters, with Q3 sales up 44 percent, putting it right on the heels of the big three-row Palisade (with Santa Fe, Elantra and Tucson above that). Knowing what a huge hit the big Palisade has been, it's clear that small is hot.

Small is larger than it used to be, too. Grouping its segment as those with width of 69 to 72 inches and length of 162 to 172 inches, where gen-one Kona used to reside, shows a shrinking handful, while the group of those from 70.5 to 73.5 inches width and 170 to 182 inches length, where gen-two Kona resides, has a growing number combining existing, new, or also resized and effectively migrated. (Competitors they freely compare with most directly include Honda HR-V, Toyota Corolla Cross and Subaru Crosstrek.) Against a larger set of nine competitors, the new Kona is tops in passenger volume (whereas the old Kona would have been next-to-last against current models) and a

tight fifth, by a tenth of a cubic foot, in cargo volume (the old one would be last), with clever customizable cargo space via a configurable folding shelf and luggage board.

Though anyone is likely to shop via relativity, Hyundai basically presents the Kona's attributes in their own right. In addition to its practicalities—convenience-oriented tech, maneuverability in tight spots, increased interior space—its less tangible factors include stylish, youthful design focus and fun-to-drive lifestyle support. Individually not unique to Kona, their collective presence is clear.

Overall evolution includes improvements to body rigidity, handling, steering and brakes, collision safety, and noise-harshness performance, all engineered for US roads and all benefiting from the starting point of the modular ICE/EV platform.

Our drive in South Carolina was diverse, from inevitable urban grid, exurban shopping stretches and freeway time, to lively two-lane country roads and even an unpaved forest road.

We had the Limited trim, with the larger 190-hp 1.6-liter turbo GDI and eight-speed automatic, which proved every bit as lively as the roads. Entering busy main roads from parking lots or side

roads, we could accelerate and carve a turn into position with great enthusiasm and confidence.

Lower trims have a 147-hp 2.0-liter Atkinson cycle 4-cylinder engine and SHIFTRONIC intelligent variable transmission. All have a nifty, tactile shift-by-wire controller on the steering column.

(The Kona Electric has either of two batteries and with that two ranges, standard and extended, and two power outputs.)

Though ultimately basically the same result, the gen-two Kona's EV-first design process means the ICE version has additional interior volume, without the battery, rather than the EV having less. Our vehicle carried two co-drivers both over six feet, and we can confirm it as spacious and comfortable—we never even thought about its size or space during a full day of driving.

As the number of vehicle sizes grows and market shares continue to shift to SUVs overall, smaller crossovers in particular, our take on the gen-two Hyundai Kona is the same as for the original. It's stylish, comfortable, roomy and quick. Unless you have a family of six or need to tow, Kona offers a size and shape—with great variety, all at attractive prices—that should cover your needs. ■



(At right) An unpaved road in the Spanish moss woods of South Carolina. • The cockpit of the Kona Limited. • Kona Electric is identifiable, especially in the rear, without the cladding of the other versions.



2024 HYUNDAI KONA LINEUP

Kona gasoline models..... FWD..... AWD

2.0L ATKINSON CYCLE 4-Cyl : 147 hp / 132 lb-ft
Intelligent Variable Transmission SHIFTRONIC®
SE..... **\$24,100**..... **\$25,600**
SEL..... **25,450**..... **26,950**
SEL+Convenience Package..... **27,650**..... **29,150**

1.6L TURBO GDI 4-cyl : 190 hp / 195 lb-ft
8-Speed Automatic Transmission
N Line..... **30,650**..... **32,150**
Limited..... **31,650**..... **33,150**

KONA N: Gen-one had a 276-hp 2.0L "Flat Power" turbo-4 and 8-speed wet dual-clutch transmission and started at \$34,200 in 2022. Gen-two has not yet been announced.

Kona Electric..... 2WD

STANDARD RANGE : est range 200 miles
48.6 kWh battery : 133 hp / 188 lb-ft
SE..... **33,550**

EXTENDED RANGE : est range 261 miles
64.8 kWh battery : 201 hp / 188 lb-ft
SEL..... **37,300**
Limited..... **41,550**

