

**by Sandie Goodwin**

## PUTTING KIA'S SPORTAGE TO THE TEST

Kia's Sportage range looks great and offers good value for money. The model we put to the test was the 2.0 XE model, which costs £15,345. On what was possibly the wettest day of 2007, we set out in the Sportage for North Wales. Once on the motorway we were extremely glad to driving a vehicle which handled so well in the wet! Our model was a manual version, but there is also an auto box available. Once we had arrived in North Wales, it continued to rain, much as the forecasters had predicted, which gave us a good opportunity to test the Sportage through muddy puddles and narrow country lanes.

First launched in January 2005, this SUV is elegant, sporty and very spacious. The Sportage has Kia's intelligent

Four-Wheel drive system, called Active Torque Transfer system, which progressively transfers drive from the front wheels to all four wheels if slippage is detected. In really bad conditions, you can simply engage the four wheel drive manually with a lock function and override this programme. Road noise in the Sportage has been reduced by clever use of thick "sandwich" panels to the inside of wheel arches and subframes to mount both the front and rear suspension which means the amount of noise and vibration in the cabin are minimal. Wind noise has also been reduced by the aerodynamic and rounded exterior of the car.

The Sportage range starts with a 140bhp 2.0-litre petrol engine with continuously variable valve timing; there is also a 173bhp 2.7-litre V6 engine with four-speed automatic transmission with manual mode. Diesel engines are now becoming more and more popular, particularly in this type of vehicle, so the 138bhp 2.0-litre common-rail turbodiesel is a good choice. Two trim levels, the XE we tested and also an XS, offer drivers a choice of extras, including ESP on the XS, with both having traction control as standard. Inside, the unique Kia "Drop & Fold" one touch system for the rear comes into its own. The backrests fold fully flat to create a spacious flat floored cargo area. Front passenger seat backrests will also fold forwards creating even more space for longer loads. 16 inch alloys, air con., a JVC CD audio system with MP3 player, electric windows and door mirrors, front fog lamps, auto light con troll, remote central locking, tilt steering



column adjustment, roof rails, sunglasses holder and a huge array of storage all come as standard in the Sportage but should you want some more luxury, XS versions have leather trim, front seat warmers, climate control, cruise control, privacy glass, electric tilt and slide sunroof and six speakers instead of four.

Luckily on the return journey from North Wales, the sun decided to make a break for it and shine. Once we had left wet Wales behind, the sun came out and the day was sunny

and bright but the Sportage soon ate up all the motorway miles back to Hertfordshire. We still felt relaxed when we got out of the Sportage, as well as having enjoyed our test drive.



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