

Another Surprise From Kia:

An Everything SUV

By Roger Witherspoon

It was late, cold, and downtown Peekskill, N.Y., was empty of pedestrians even though Main Street was brightly lit with floodlights and twinkling Christmas ornaments. I had stopped for a red light and a man in an old Ford Explorer SUV pulled up along side, rolled down his window, and asked “What is that? It looks way too good to really be a Kia.”

“That’s what it is, Buddy,” I informed him. “It’s a Kia Borrego SUV. They pack some surprises in their cars these days.”

He asked to see the car, so I pulled over in front of the fire station and gave him the short tour, starting from the rear. I opened the trunk, and he was surprised to see there was a third row of seats. It is actually an option – when the seats are up, the trunk disappears. On the other hand, the third row is actually usable, if you need it. There is more than enough space between the seat and the rear of the second row for two, properly positioned child seats, or two adults under six feet in height. These seats fold down at the touch of a button, however, to provide enough space to haul a washer or dryer.

Getting into the third row is awkward. The running board make it relatively easy to step up to enter the Borrego, but then the second row has to be folded down and slid forward to have access to the rear seats. It is a tight fit for adults.

The second row of wide, padded, leather seats have enough head and leg room for a pair of NBA players. This is an SUV designed for zoned climates, and there are a set of blowers and controls for the second and third rows. He noted that the décor of the doors was a mix of chrome, molded plastic, and padded, double-stitched leather – features he expected to find in expensive imports, but not Kias.

His real surprise came when he sat in the front passenger seat, rested a beefy arm on the wide, padded leather arm rest, and listened to the smooth sounds of Miles wafting over the 10 Infinity speakers. It took a moment for him to realize that the seat was heated, and I showed him where to adjust the temperature. The arm rest is in two sections, with the smaller, upper portion useful for holding and recharging cell phones.

I noticed he had an iPod in his pocket and pointed to the plug-in on the center, molded plastic console for USB Flash drives, iPods, and MP3 players. The console also has holders large enough for liter water bottles, and a deep tray which can hold transit passes and other items. Miles quickly gave way to Bluegrass, but the system didn’t mind at all.

And then he slowly took in the rest of the newest Kia SUV: The touch screen navigation system, the AM/FM/ and Sirius Satellite radio, the single disc CD player, sunroof, and fingertip controls on the adjustable steering wheel for both the cruise command and entertainment system.

“Can I ask how much this cost?” said my guest.

“It’s MSRP is about \$36,000” I said.

“How do they pack all this into that price?” he asked.

“I don’t know, buddy,” I said. “That seems to be what Kia does.”

And on that note, we parted.

He wasn't the first to ask me for a tour of the Kia, a brand which seems to draw as much interest as some of the extremely high end vehicles – primarily because Kias tend to look and sound a lot better than most people expect of a brand which has become a staple target of Jay Leno's monologues.