

# Soul has dizzying array of seven different trim levels

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replaces the previous five-speed. A new, optional six-speed automatic has bumped the old four-speed version.

The 1.6-litre is perky enough to please, but customers in search of a little more oomph can opt up for the new 2.0-litre engine harnessing a healthy 164 hp (up 22 hp) with the same choice of transmissions. Unfortunately, we don't get the diesel four-banger available in Europe and other markets and, keeping in mind the economy level position mentioned earlier, only front-wheel-drive is available.

New standard additions to the Soul lineup are rounded out by the addition of tilt/telescopic steering, Vehicle Stability Management (VSM) and a Hill-start Assist Control (HAC) system. There's a new Infinity audio system and a UVO audio infotainment system available for top-of-the-line trims.

And, speaking of trim, the 2012 Soul comes in a dizzying array of seven different trim levels— 1.6, 1.6 ECO, 2U, 4U, 4U Retro, 4U Burner, and 4U Luxury. If that's not enough flavour choice, customers can pimp the personalization factor from a list of over 60 accessories, with everything from sport spoilers to dragon decals, even a tent attachment.

I'll stick with describing my as-tested offering, starting with the base 1.6-litre engine and the typically healthy list of all-inclusive standards set by most Korean manufacturers— six airbags, four-wheel disc brakes bolstered by technologies that include Electronic Stability Control (ESC), Traction Control System (TCS), Electronic Brake Distribution (EBD), Brake Assist System (BAS).

The base model comes with 15-inch steel wheels, tilt/telescopic elec-

tric power steering (EPS), tinted glass, power windows, power door locks, heated power mirrors, heated front seats and Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity, and a four-speaker AM/FM/CD/MP3 stereo with aux and iPod ports. Also standard are fog lights, auto-off headlamps, body-coloured door handles and outside mirrors, variable intermittent windshield wipers and a rear wiper/washer.

If air conditioning was included, it would be perfect. This well-stocked 2012 Soul base model starts at a very competitive \$16,595.

My tester added the six-speed Steptronic automatic along with an Active Eco System that can be engaged to reduce acceleration response and change transmission shift patterns for better mileage. The air conditioning also comes with this package, with a driver's armrest thrown in to boot.

Soul has beat the competition with an optional, fuel-saving Idle Stop and Go (ISG) system that temporarily turns off the engine when the vehicle is not in motion, like, say at a stoplight.

This is the first time I've come across the technology in a non-hybrid application and, because it doesn't use the larger electric motor of a hybrid, re-starts ring with that classic 'ning-ning-ning' starter motor sound. But the engine gets up and going before your foot can make the transition from brake to gas pedal. It's not perfect.

The ISG only works when the engine management system decides that all of

the right criteria have been met— battery condition, grade angle, steering angle, even whether the ambient temperature is between -2C to 35C, which rules out a good-sized chunk of the Canadian winter.

But it remains an impressive start and hopeful step towards



Inside, the 2012 Kia Soul has been refined with upgraded materials and instrumentation and with an accent on reducing noise, vibration and harshness (NVH).

a universal idle-free future.

With this combination of technologies, the Soul 1.6 ECO with the ISG system offers an optimistic 7.0/5.4L/100km (city/hwy) rating, although those lab numbers are rarely reflected in real world driving. My combined averages were a more realistic 8.3L/100km.

The Kia Soul is a pleasure to drive with more than adequate power, well-finished interior appointments and tall, boxy dimensions that create an airy and roomy cabin for passengers, along with 546 litres (19.3 cu.ft.) of cargo space, expanding to 1,511 litres (53.4 cu.ft.) with the 60/40 second row folded.

The Kia Soul was designed for a youthful audience but I think it offers cross-generational appeal courtesy of contemporary styling, funky personality, large-windowed openness, a raised hip point and easy access, an abundance of headroom, lightweight tailgate and steering operation, and dollar-value packaging that blends practicality with price-point choices for a wide selection of consumer needs and budgets.

The 2012 Kia Soul 1.6 ECO— what more can I say?

It's certainly made our family's shortlist.

## Kia Soul 2012 1.6 ECO A/T (at a glance)

**BODY STYLE:** Compact five-passenger hatchback.

**DRIVE METHOD:** front-engine, front-wheel-drive

**ENGINE:** As tested 1.6-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder (138 hp, 123 lb/ft)

**FUEL ECONOMY:** 7.0/5.4L/100km (city/hwy); as tested actual 8.3L/100km (comb)

**CARGO:** 546 litres (19.3 cu ft) behind rear seat; 1,511 litres (53.4 cu ft) folded.

**TOW RATING:** NA

**PRICE:** As tested \$19,995; Additional equipment above \$16,595 base price includes six-speed automatic transmission, Active ECO, air conditioning, driver's armrest, ISG system, remote keyless, cruise control, 16-inch alloy wheels with low resistance rolling tires, satellite radio.

**WEBSITE:** [www.kia.ca](http://www.kia.ca)



The 2012 Soul 1.6 ECO A/T harnesses a 138 hp, 1.6-litre GDI (gasoline direct injection) four-cylinder engine mated here to a six-speed Steptronic automatic with Active Eco system and new optional Idle Stop and Go (ISG) system.

## SPECIALS OF THE WEEK



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