

Kia has done its homework and the proof is the Sorento

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part-time 4WD system that is primarily rear-drive but with torque being able to shift to the front with the drive mode controlled by a rotary knob on the dash. This system can tow up to 3,500 lb. Fuel consumption is listed at 14.0L/100 km city and 9.2L/100 km highway.

The LX luxury priced at \$38,995 is equipped with a 3.8-litre DOHC V6 with 262 hp and 260 lb/ft of torque with a full-time 4WD system that can shift torque up to 50:50, front:rear, again with a rotary knob to the left of the steering wheel. In this guise towing is listed at 5,000 lb and fuel economy at 14.0L/100 km city and 9.8L/100 km highway.

Both engines run on regular fuel.

The \$6,500 difference between the two Sorentos is engines and 4WD systems plus things like climate control and 17-inch wheels on the LX Luxury compared to manual air and 16-inch tires on the LX. There is a lot more on the LX Luxury like leather and power sunroof, but the Kia.ca website spells it all out.

One thing worth noting is both versions come with full spares mounted on alloy wheels, not donut tires that should not be driven more than 100 km.

From the outside, the 2008 Sorento is little changed in appearance with the exception of a few things like a revised grille. Beneath the skin, much was changed like the frame, which is shared with no other Kia or Hyundai (that own Kia) for that matter.

Kia made a big deal at the Sorento press launch about the cost differences between it and its main competitors. It's a bit like apples and oranges, but the base LX is about 27 per cent less than a comparably equipped Ford Explorer XLT and about 18 per cent less than a Nissan Pathfinder S.

What the Sorento should have made more about is the size compared to price. The LX is a mid-size but has most of the equipment of some of the current compact SUV/CUVs on the market. The back seat is roomy enough for big adults with 878 litres (31.7 cu. ft) of cargo area behind the second row seats.

A Quebec colleague, Sylvie Rainville, has a brother who is the owner of a first generation Sorento. They are a family who love to go on fishing trips into the many lakes and streams north of Quebec City. The first generation has a 3.5-litre V6 with 192 hp that she said just wasn't enough to haul five adults into the bush. With the 3.3-litre, she said its 242 hp would be fine but the extra 20 hp of the 3.8-litre would probably be the one she would be suggesting to her brother.

While we put on something like 700 km in two days from Calgary to Jasper and back, none of the driving was off-road. One Calgary-based journalist did take another route he knew that included gravel stretches. His remark was the Sorento was very solid which it should be with a gross vehicle weight ratio of 2,560 kg or 5,644 lb., but washboards had to be taken slowly due to the stiff suspension.

I drove the LX Luxury on the way up to Jasper and the LX on the route from an overnight stop in Lake Louise to Calgary. My sense is that the 17-inch tires intensified the road irregularities with the 16-inchers on the LX giving a smoother ride. BUT, the route to Calgary was on the billiard table flat Trans Canada Highway while the road to Jasper, while well maintained, had suffered from frost heave rippling.

If you have never taken the drive from Lake Louise to Jasper in the summer, do so. It is 240 km of one breathtaking vista after another. I don't know how many times I stopped to take a beauty shot of the Sorento against a majestic view only to find another just around the next bend.

With no radio reception to speak of, my co-driver and I, another long-time auto journalist and I talked about all the people we've seen come and go over the years and how automobiles and the auto industry has changed, which eventually led to Kia and how it has come from nowhere.

Twenty years ago when the Hyundai Pony was new, the thought of a Korean car company being able to compete in a major segment, let alone being a leader in terms of quality, was unthinkable.

Yet Kia, in a decade, has improved by leaps and bounds.

They have done their homework, seen where buying habits were going and met the market with the products people want with the 2008 Sorento being the latest.

Dean Tesser assured me Kia wouldn't get caught like it did last time with too few Rondos and that there is a steady stream of 2008 Sorentos is on the way.

Kia is going to need every one.

KIA SORENTO SUV 2008 AT A GLANCE

BODY STYLE: Mid-size SUV.

DRIVE METHOD: front-engine, four-wheel-drive.

ENGINE: 3.3-litre, DOHC V6 (242 hp, 228 lb/ft): 3.8-



The Sorento is offered with four-wheel-drive only. Drive mode is selected by a rotary knob on the lower dash to the left of the steering wheel.

Photo by Jim Robinson

litre DOHC V6 (262 hp, 260 lb/ft)

FUEL ECONOMY: 3.3-litre, 14.0/9.2L/100 km city/highway; 3.8-litre, 14.0/9.8L/100 km city/highway.

PRICE: LX, \$32,495; LX-Luxury, \$38,995.

WEBSITE: kia.ca.



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