

First drive: Kia Cadenza 2014 reaches for the top

Story and photos by Jim Robinson
Metroland Media

NAPA, Ca: With 47 new or refreshed vehicles coming by 2017, it was inevitable Kia would take another step up the product ladder which it has done with the 2014 Cadenza.

The Cadenza is considered a "near luxury" sedan with a similar size and a host of features found in the \$50,000 plus bracket like the Mercedes E-Class or Audi A6.

In fact, the Cadenza starts at \$37,795 for the "Base" model and \$44,995 for the Premium.

Kia more sensibly sees the Cadenza as going up against Acura TL, Nissan Maxima, Lincoln MKZ and Buick LaCrosse. But Kia had a big chart at the Napa press preview showing its competitors don't have all the available extras as the Cadenza, which is something I'm sure Kia sales people will be pointing out to potential buyers.

The Cadenza is not a new car but new to Canada and will be sold as Kia's flagship model. It is known as the K7 in Korea sold alongside the K9 which is Kia's flagship over there.

The Cadenza is considered a full-size sedan and it is in every sense of the word, especially the back seat. During our drive time in San Francisco and the Napa Valley, I made a point of getting in the back and I had more than enough legroom.

Later while driving, I had to stop smartly

and that caused my travel bag to slide forward off the back seat and onto the floor. It's a big bag and normally it gets wedged between the front seat back and the rear cushion. In this case, it plopped onto the floor and looked rather lonely with all the room around it.

Kia/Hyundai is the only automaker to produce its own steel and in the Cadenza, high-strength steel makes up 60 per cent of the chassis. Kia said at the Cadenza press launch this ensures only the highest quality steel is used in the Cadenza's construction.

There is one engine, Kia's new 3.3-litre direct injection V6 producing 293 hp and 255 lb/ft of torque driving the front wheels through a six-speed automatic transmission featuring paddle shifters on the steering wheel.

Using regular gasoline, fuel consumption is rated at 11.2/7.4L/100 km city/highway.

One thing that caused some discussion among autowriters present for the press launch in the Napa Valley of California was the steering.

My Quebec co-driver found it "vague" while Graeme Fletcher of Motoring TV called it one of the best he'd driven. I did note that FlexSteer (that offers three response modes in the latest Kia offerings) was not on the Cadenza. I was told that's because it was an older model and it could not be refitted with FlexSteer.



Striking a pose in front of the house that was the setting for Alfred Hitchcock's landmark thriller, *The Birds*, the 2014 Cadenza is Kia's first foray into the full-size near luxury sedan market.

The only thing to do was find out for myself.

I know the roads in Napa fairly well and one of those is the Silverado Trail that runs north-south beside the Napa River.

Twisting and turning, but with pavement as smooth as glass, you can really put any vehicle through its paces, which I did.

Bottom line was the steering was precise and predictable with a hint of on-centre lightness which one expects from electric power steering. The feel of the Cadenza steering fits the nature of the car

as buyers in this segment expect comfort in a sedan not the input effort one needs in a sports car.

Standard equipment is extensive, the partial list includes: rear parking sensors, rear camera, multimedia interface Navigation, AM/FM/CD/AUX/USB, SiriusXM satellite radio, Bluetooth wireless technology, Infinity 12-speaker audio system, chrome outside door handles, solar glass, projection headlights, front fog lights, LED daytime running lights and positioning lights, LED light bar tail lights, power heated body coloured outside mirrors, power folding outside mirrors with LED side repeaters, front and rear splash guard, dot matrix LCD cluster and trip computer.

But it was with the Premium that the Kia blurs with line between "near luxury" and the real thing.

This car is loaded. Again, just a partial list of goodies includes: panoramic sunroof, HID headlamps with adaptive front lighting (AFLS), triple stage cooled/ventilated driver's seat, dual stage rear heated seats, power tilt and telescopic steering wheel, memory seats, memory outside mirrors, memory steering column, driver's seat knee extension, heated steering wheel, wiper deicer, power rear window curtain, Supervision TFT LCD instrument cluster, premium Nappa leather seats, 19-inch alloy wheels, smart cruise control, blind spot detection, Lane Departure Warning System and Electric Parking Brake (EPB).

One of the things that caught everyone's attention is the use of "hydrophobic" glass on the front side windows. They are treated with a special, permanent coating that repels water and dirt.

And you like to golf, you can take a four-some and their bags in the 451-litre trunk.

Suspension is MacStruts at the front and a multi-link setup at the rear. Part of the suspension comprises "dynamic dampers" that automatically soften when cruising but stiffen when more handling performance is wanted.

I'm not a fan of adaptive cruise control but many are, especially at the luxury level. On the Cadenza speed can be set between 30-180 km/h.

I feel the same about lane departure systems because I find the bell/chime/whatever is annoying and distracting plus it adds to the stress level in the middle of a critical situation. Luckily, it can be turned off.

Ten, even five years ago, there was a big gap between the perception of Kia and reality of Kia. By that I mean people used to think of Kias as "cheap and cheerful" transportation. But with each new product, Canadians continue to be won over by the styling that is the gateway to the built quality and content.

The Cadenza marks new territory for Kia and it is very much the new boy on the near luxury block. But based on what we've seen so far, Kia will probably be one of the big boys on the block before very long.

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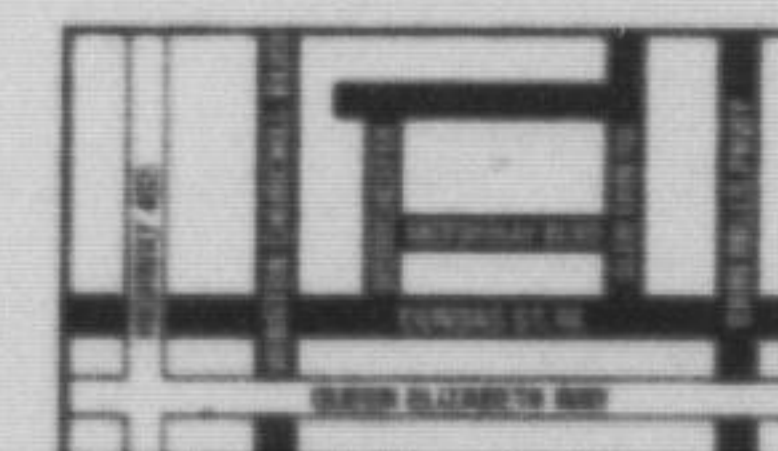


Mississauga Volkswagen

2420 Motorway Blvd., Mississauga, ON

Tel: 905.569.3233 • Fax: 905.569.3022

www.mississaugavw.com info@mississaugavw.com



IntelliChoice Inc., October 2008 review of 31 manufacture programs. See www.intellichoice.com for additional details, explanation of results and program updates. Based on U.S. Program analysis. Roadside assistance is provided by Professional Dispatch Group. See dealer for additional details about the warranty. Finance plans available on approved credit through Volkswagen Finance. 0.9% APR financing pertains to finance terms up to 24 month only on all 2007-2011 M.Y. Volkswagen Assurance vehicles. Rates start at .90%-4.9% up to 60 months for other models. Financing example: \$15,000 financed at 2.9% for 48 months, monthly payment is \$375.21, cost of borrowing is \$1,026.08 for a total obligation of \$16,026.08. Dealer may sell for less. Down payment maybe required. OAC, PPSA, insurance, and applicable taxes are extra. Offers expire June 30, 2013.