

Kia earns respect with new Spectra

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-els. All versions have ventilated discs at the front. Except for the base LX, that has drum brakes at the rear, solid discs are standard with ABS only available on the topline EX Luxury.

Suspension is contemporary for the class being coil springs over gas struts at the front, independent multi-link at the rear, and stabilizer bars at both ends. All versions have 15-inch wheels.

The base car is the LX for manual transmission priced at \$15,895 or \$16,995 for the automatic. The \$17,695 LX Convenience adds air conditioning, power locks/windows and heated power remote mirrors. Ordering the automatic raises the price by \$1,100.

Next up is the EX manual at \$18,695 which adds cruise control and alloy wheels to the LX Convenience. Again, the automatic is a \$1,100 option. Lastly there is the EX manual (auto add \$1,100) that gives you fog lamps, driver's active headrest, and ABS for \$19,995.

Kia kindly put an EX automatic at my disposal and let me go where I wanted without a Kia rep at my side to talk up the product. They were prepared to let me make up my own mind in private—a very enlightened approach indeed. It said to me Kia is quite willing to let the Spectra do the talking and be judged on its own merits.

The venue was California's Pacific Coast Highway out of Santa Monica with the plan to get to Highway 101 and on to Santa Barbara. At the end of March, California is a magical place to be compared to cloudy and dank Toronto. With the sun full out, the temperature hovering at 22 C, and the highway in a lazy Saturday afternoon mode, it was time to roll down the windows and enjoy.

On this stretch of road you see everything



The interior of the 2005 Spectra is uncluttered and the quality of the materials, like the plastics, makes this a much more enjoyable place to be

from the mid-'60s Ferrari 330GTC (in red of course), to Plum Crazy-painted Hemi Cudas, to a brace of Shelby Cobras. All this non-plused the little Spectra, more than holding its own swapping lanes. Because people here drive fast and using turn signals is anathema in southern California, it's important that the sightlines be good as well as the brakes.

After a long winter, I couldn't help stopping at an ocean-side park and wander down to the beach to watch the para-surfers, their rainbow hued chutes propelling them across the wave tops. The sun was so warm, stream-

ing in through the open door windows and with the seat reclined, I confess I lost track of time.

When you have to get back on the PCH, it is usually from a sand or gravel shoulder and into the teeth of Californians who don't believe in giving anyone a break. Here the Spectra had the power to get up to speed when it counted. I noticed the same thing later exiting from the Santa Monica Pier parking lot. Getting up to speed, the automatic shifted crisply.

This welcome jolt of horses was appreciat-

DRIVE METHOD	Front engine, front wheel drive
ENGINE	2.0 litre DOHC inline four-cylinder (138hp, 136 lb/ft)
PRICE	Base LX five-speed manual \$15,895; EX four-speed

ed later in the evening, crawling through dinner-time bumper-to-bumper traffic in Venice, the world capital of the loonies and drifters. When someone in front decides to turn left and just stop to look aimlessly around, the trick is to spot a crack between cars in the next lane and make your move. But you have to have the steering and throttle response (not to mention reflexes) to do it. Here the Spectra performed perfectly.

I was happy! A good day, a good drive and a good car.

The segment where the Spectra sits is jammed with worthy competitors: Chev Cavalier/Pontiac Sunfire, Honda Civic, Volkswagen Golf, step-sister Hyundai Elantra and the new hot favorite in the class, Mazda3.

But with the changes to the 2005 Spectra, it certainly ranks right up there with the competition.

Kia, like I said at the top, is looking for respect, and with the new Spectra, it's deserved.

Wheels

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