

Tough Enough

*Motor
Madness*



Ian Lamming heads over the top in Kia's new Sportage

LISTEN to your satnav and you could end up missing all the fun.

I'm in Lanchester and I want to get to Barnard Castle. The lady behind the dash has plotted a route via the A1, but that would take me east through Durham before heading south and then back west again to Barney.

However, being a local, I know it's better to go to Wolsingham, turn right to Frosterley then left, straight over the tops to Eggleston.

I'm so glad I listen to my gut not to technology because that's got to be one of the country's great drives and no better place to put Kia's brilliant new Sportage through its paces.

I've always been a massive fan of this relatively large and supremely able SUV. It was great to look at, brilliant to drive and was going to be a difficult act to follow. Then the new one appeared and guess what? It's even better.

The new looks are fabulous, completely different and all the better for it. Sportage looks tough, like a 21st century all terrain vehicle, all mean and muscular – I love it.

Back end looks Italian, Alfa-esque and very stylish and the interior is brilliant; so spacious, so comfortable, so well equipped and thought through.

Towns, motorways, car parks, Sportage is suited to them all. But its real strength is cross country.

This thing loves bends, banks and bombing about. It takes on a different persona, particularly with the spirited and genuinely quick 1.6 litre turbo petrol.

You might want to head over to the excellent 1.7 diesel for a bit more economy but if you can live with mpg figures in the 30s then the petrol is a peerless drive.

The small steering wheel and sharp responses, coupled to fabulous ride, tenacious grip and slick six-speed box make Sportage a thoroughly involving and dynamic drive on the asphalt.

But it is also a proper off-roader thanks to all wheel drive and diff lock that allow it to tackle mud, snow and gravel or even the scourge of the modern motorist, wet grass.

Most weeks I am asked by friends and acquaintances how best to invest their hard earned cash in a new set of wheels.

Depending on the sector it can be a tough choice but for those looking for a big SUV it's an awful lot easier since new Sportage came on the scene.

Fact File

- Kia Sportage
- Engine: 1.6 petrol turbo
- Power: 174BHP
- 0-62mph: 9.2 secs
- Top speed: 126mph
- Combined MPG: 37.2
- Transmission: six-speed manual
- CO2 g/km: 177