

Optimising practicality

Ian Lamming test drives the new Kia Optima

Fact File

Kia Optima
Engine: 1.7 litre
turbo petrol
Power: 134BHP
0-62mph: NA
Top speed: 125mph
Combined miles per
gallon: 57.6
Transmission: six
speed manual
Insurance: 16
CO2 g/km: 128

SALOONS, remember when that's all there used to be? Now they are in the minority.

Today we seem more obsessed with SUVs or sports tourers; that's the old estate car by the way. The hatchback is still lurking in the background, mainly because they are more practical than booters but look almost the same.

When Kia produced the Optima it was then a brave move as it was never going to be a mass-market success. But produce a four-door they did and to make it stand out designers penned arguably one of the best looking cars on the roads today.

It is beautiful; long, elegant, svelte, styled to perfection. It looks fabulous from any angle and has been honed by a little makeover to the front and rear. Few cars have such glorious lines. In many ways it is radical yet it is so sophisticated that it hasn't dated and won't for many years to come; quite an achievement.

The great thing is that equal attention to detail has gone into the interior, which is also just plain lovely. Cockpit-orientated, the driver will love being the centre of

attention, surrounded by dials, instruments, switches and controls.

But the passengers have been looked after too. The space is generous, the interior tactile and well equipped and the boot is massive. It's just a great way to travel.

Driving dynamics are excellent as well. The 1.7 diesel does an impressive job at propelling the Optima along the motorways and it relishes the gradients of hills and dales. It handles like a good-un.

The steering is sharp, the ride controlled and grip levels more than enough to boost driver confidence off the scale.

Expect great miles per gallon and emissions to help with running costs and what more can you ask for?

The automotive world turns full circle and it won't be too long before drivers realize they don't really need the barn-door-like aesthetics of an SUV or big estate car. It will be cars like the Optima that remind us just why the humble saloon used to be as popular as it was.

