

A perfect companion

Fact File

SsangYong Korando

Engine: 2.0 turbo diesel

Power: 149PS

0-62mph: 9.9 secs

Max towing weight: 2,000kg

Combined miles per gallon: 37.7

Transmission: six speed auto

Insurance: 19

CO2 g/km: 199

TEN minutes away from our Lakeland destination the phones ring; it's a job, a night job and it's back in Darlington.

As a boy who just can't say no there's only one thing to do, drop off the family, pay a quick call and head back to the North-East 75 miles away.

Job done and it's 10pm as I drive back towards the Lake District, looking forward to the sweet smell of National Park air as I arrive and open the car door.

But some days are just like that aren't they and the Friday night spoilsport gremlin isn't finished with me yet. Just west of Kirby Stephen and only ten miles short of Tebay the road is closed, police everywhere. There are flashing lights aplenty but no sign of the boys in blue to ask what is occurring so the only option is to head back the way I came then cut off to Sedburgh.

It is a quarter to midnight when I finally get the long anticipated whiff of Lyth Valley air and you could be forgiven for thinking my mood would be glum – but it's not.

Why? Because I have thoroughly enjoyed the ride over, the ride back, even the diversion. I will have clocked up 300 plus miles in the process, so I could have reached London and beyond, but I'm smiling and breathing, largely thanks to the test vehicle, a SsangYong Korando.

A what? I hear some of you cry? Well, Korando is Korean,

this is the second generation and it remains a cracking car in all areas save one.

To drive, this SUV is a beauty. The 2.0 litre diesel is powerful, responsive, spritely, but it's not particularly economical. Expect low 30s when it comes to miles per gallon. I only once see 39mpg on the trip computer and when I'm being a clodhopper it drops to 29.

That said, the Korando handles all that performance with aplomb. The all wheel drive comes into play when needed and it really grips regardless of the surface or degree of curvature. You can lock it all up for the really tricky stuff too making this a genuine off-roader. Steering responds instantly making it a thoroughly enjoyable drive.

Quality is excellent and so is the specification; there are heated leather seats front and back, satnav, cruise, Bluetooth, parking sensors and air conditioning. The Kenwood touch screen is fiddly but the hi-fi sounds great. The first Korando was a really good looking car and its replacement has opted for a more angular look, which is fine. The proportions remain ideal; it's large enough to be accommodating but not too bulky to be unwieldy. I like it and the acid test has to be the impromptu NE/NW foray late on a Friday night in which the SsangYong proves to be the perfect companion.

By Ian Iamming

