

LIFE AFTER SPORT! CARS



If you want all that, Kia really are doing their best for you, and in the past few years especially they've rolled up their sleeves on build-quality and aesthetics, too. The Sorento even looks a bit like a Lexus, but costs a hell of a lot less. And this is more than a cosmetic update. The 2007 Sorento was a solid, no frills affair; for 2009, there's a new monocoque frame, meaning it's a little longer at the front, but 55mm lower, and a startling 215kg lighter, with genuine comfort inside for seven adults.

Alpha drove the 2.2L diesel, which claims to drink 7.4L of derv every hundred kays. Even with the

“The Sorento drinks a fifth less diesel than it did a couple of years ago.”

windows up, aircon off and sweating, we couldn't quite manage that, but it's still more than a fifth less than what it was costing you a couple of years ago.

Inside is a combination of basic and surprisingly speccy. Plastics still rule, but the dash is clear, and intuitive enough to let you keep your attention on the road. And just as you've settled for that, you realise there's a reversing camera; and dual-zone aircon; leather seats; proximity warnings for nervous parkers; and a six-speaker MP3-compatible sound system.

Ride quality has improved, too. There's almost no impression that you're lugging such a big wagon behind you. Independent, self-levelling, multi-link suspension sounds like a mechanics' love-in, but it means a beautifully smooth ride and excellent shock absorption, no matter how much everyone's overateen at Christmas. It's sharper, too, with more stable handling on corners and enough feedback through the wheel to make you feel that you're really in control.

At this point you may wonder when the heck we'll drive it up mountains or along river beds, but we won't. It wouldn't be fair. To make all the above possible, Kia beat a tactical retreat elsewhere. Gone is the big 3.3L petrol or 2.5L diesel engine and the Sorento's low-range grinding ability, and with it the image of the rugged bush-basher. In its place is a smoother, quieter, more solid urban drive, with as much flexibility as you could reasonably expect. If you want to go the far side of Bourke, that's your other car. — *Ivan Smith*

From \$36,490; 2.2L SLi diesel, \$45,990

KOREA CHANGE

Switched to the new Kia Sorento? Nice work

Funny how brands can morph. Not even 20 years ago, the American car industry was what made America great, with General Motors its shining symbol of economic might and industrial and technological invincibility.

What a difference a couple of decades make. GM is having an enforced rethink, and the industry there is trying to introduce its lardy populace to the concepts of “smaller” and “fuel-efficient”. But some have been preparing for the current belt-tightening for

years. Once mocked as flimsy and low-rent, who knew the Korean car industry would one day save us all?

Companies like Kia are not too proud to give us what we want at an affordable price. The new, improved Kia Sorento is the current leader in the “medium urban SUV” class, which means it's the closest thing you can get to a regular runabout, yet still do a bit of light off-roading with all the fishing gear in the back and be able to take the entire family, including Nanna, to Crusty Demons on Sunday.

STRAIGHT DRIVE

VOLKSWAGEN AMAROK

VW will supply 35 Amoraks as support vehicles to withstand the Patagonian rigours of the new 9000km Dakar Rally course through Argentina and Chile. Now that's bragging rights. Should be available here in the next few months.



MAZDA2 SEDAN

The \$20,000-30,000 market is likely to get a new entrant in 2010 with the Thai-made Mazda2 sedans. The 1.5-litre, 76kw, petrol engine has a new non-toxic paint that reduces volatile organic compounds and evil carbon emissions.



PEUGEOT 4007

Sounding like an inner-Brisbane postcode, the 4007 from Peugeot is a new candidate for the soft-roader market of urban warriors who like a bit of camping occasionally. The French company's offering is among the most fuel-efficient in its big-arsed class. \$50,000



ON YA BIKE

CONCEPT 6

The Concept 6 is the template for the next additions to BMW's K-Series, with a touring bike the first release. The power unit is only marginally smaller than the one used for BMW's four-cylinder engines, and hollow-drilled camshafts and light connecting rods keep weight down. No word yet on cost.



SUZUKI HAYABUSA

Suzuki's “Ultimate Sport” machine is a combination of speed, power and acceleration. And speed. Topping out well past the eye-blurring 300km/h mark, the 2010 Hayabusa features a “drive mode selector” (S-DMS, naturally) for different road conditions and testicle sizes. Burn your licence. \$XX,XXX



FISCHER MRX 650CC

Designed to be an affordable American interloper into the Japan- and Europe-dominated sports bike scene, the MRX 650cc has a light aluminium chassis designed by Gemini Technologies, which has the Harley Davidson VR1000 on its CV. Less than \$14,000.



WACKY RACERS

STANFORD UNIVERSITY DRIVERLESS CAR

Stanford boffins reckon driverless cars will be on the world's roads by 2020. The vehicles will recognise other cars and objects on the road and react accordingly, all while you sleep off a 12-hour bender in the back seat.



TRABANT

Now that the US car industry has become a state-owner enterprise, time is ripe for the return of the Communist-era Trabant. German-based coachbuilder IndiKar caused a storm in 2009 when it revealed a concept car at a motor show and reckons the Trabbie will be back this year.



BMW SIMPLE

The three-wheeled car market has added a big boy to its line-up. BMW's fuel-efficient SIMPLE (Sustainable and Innovative Mobility Product for Low Energy) concept is as roomy as BMW's rather spiffy 3 Series coupés. No word on it entering a showroom, though.

