

Kia Borrego is a keeper

by *Mark_Maynard*

Kia may have missed the wild party of sales for sport utility vehicles, but it had time to evaluate the competition, learn from their mistakes and make improvements for its new seven-passenger Borrego, sold in V-6 and V-8 models.

The Kia Borrego's exterior styling is basic SUV, but there are no contrived curves and bulges that get in the way of sightlines or comfort. Photo courtesy of Kia. **SPEC BOX**

Body style: midsize, seven-passenger sport utility vehicle

Engine: aluminum, 4.6-liter V-8

Horsepower: 337 at 6,000 rpm

Torque: 323 foot-pounds of torque at 3,500 rpm

Transmission: six-speed automatic

EPA fuel economy estimates: 15 mpg city, 22 highway (15/20 4WD); 87 octane recommended

Fuel capacity: 20.6 gallons

Length/wheelbase: 192.3/114 inches

Curb weight: 4,405 pounds (4,621 4WD)

Tow capacity: 7,500 pounds (5,000 V-6)

FEATURES

Standard equipment includes remote locking, air conditioning, power locks-windows-mirrors, cruise control, six-speaker CD-MP3 audio system with Sirius satellite radio, and USB and auxiliary input jacks

EX trim includes eight-way power adjustable driver's seat, four-way power adjustable front passenger's seat, floor mats, dual-zone automatic climate control, Homelink garage opener with compass, steering wheel-mounted audio controls, trip computer, and a leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob

Safety features include front advanced air bags, front seat-mounted side bags, full-length side-curtains for all three rows, driver's knee air bag (V-8 only), four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, electronic stability control, traction control, electronic brake distribution, brake assist and tire-pressure monitoring

CHASSIS

Brakes: 4-wheel discs; 12.9 inch vented discs front, 12.8-inch rear

Steering: power-assisted rack and pinion; turning circle, 36.4 feet

Suspension: front, double-wishbone, coil spring with shock absorbers and stabilizer bar; rear, multilink, coil spring with damper and stabilizer bar

Tires and wheels: P245/70R17

PRICING

Base: \$31,745, including \$750 freight charge; price as tested, \$36,545

Options on test SUV: navigation system, \$1,500; Luxury Package, \$1,500, includes leather-trimmed seats, heated front seats, power tilt and telescopic steering wheel and memory settings for the driver's seat, outside mirrors and steering wheel

Premium Package, \$1,800, includes everything in the Luxury Package plus a sunroof, a 10-speaker Infinity audio system, rear air conditioning with controls, running boards and a rear camera display for enhanced visual assistance

Warranty: 10-year/100,000-mile limited power train warranty; five-year/60,000-mile limited basic warranty with roadside assistance; five-year/100,000-mile corrosion The Korean carmaker's considerate SUV is a contender for drivers who actually may have a need to get their vehicle dirty visiting backcountry property or towing a recreational trailer.

This is not a trucky SUV, despite its trucklike ladder frame. It has been made on-road compliant by a multilink rear suspension, which does a good job of minimizing head toss and bounce. And it can tow up to 7,500 pounds amid an interior that is European in styling and refinement.

To appease critics, it earned five-star crash safety ratings from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; both engine choices use 87 octane fuel; and the basic warranty is five years or 60,000 miles, besting the competition's standard three-year policies.

Borrego is sold in LX and EX trim levels with V-6 and V-8 engines, rear-or four-wheel-drive. Pricing starts at just under \$27,000, which includes a five-speed automatic "versus" a six-speed for V-8 models. Standard equipment includes remote locking, air conditioning, power locks/windows/mirrors, cruise control, six-speaker CD-MP3 audio system with Sirius satellite radio and USB and auxiliary input jacks. Add \$2,050 for Torque on Demand four-wheel drive.

The LX V-8 starts at \$31,745 and the EX V-8 test truck with options was \$36,545.

A top-line Limited V-8 â€” \$38,745 â€” features a black monotone exterior with black interior trim, with extras such as push-button start/smart key, Supervision meter cluster, power adjustable pedals, chrome accents on outside door handles and rear garnish, heated second row seats, Bluetooth, Limited exterior badging and floor mats.

Borrego competitors include the Toyota 4Runner and Highlander, Nissan Pathfinder, Honda Pilot, Ford Explorer, Chevrolet Trailblazer, Jeep Grand Cherokee and GMC Acadia.

The Borrego does what the competition does, but bests them on fuel economy.

The six-speed automatic gives the V-8 model a slight advantage for highway mileage over the V-6. The 3.8-liter V-6 2WD has city/highway fuel economy of 17/21 to the V-8's 15/22.

That's not great, but not bad for a vehicle that can pull 7,500 pounds and haul up to seven people in good comfort. Pickups struggle to get 21 mpg, tow about the same and don't have as many seats.

Depending on how hard you press the pedal, the V-8's acceleration can seem very forceful — unlike the V-6 model, which is making the best of a two-ton situation. The six-speed does out well-timed shifts and the brake response — with substantial, 12-inch, four-wheel discs - is flat and forceful. The turning circle, 36.48 feet, is the tightest of the competitors.

The cabin is soundproofed well, but at highway speeds there is some wind noise as this SUV shape punches through the air.

I liked Borrego's modest exterior size but with roomy seating for seven. The third row folds flat into the floor when not needed and the folded second row is almost flat, too, for those who camp and sleep in their SUV.

Unexpected but appreciated interior features include a cooled center storage console; well-padded armrests; rubber liners for cup holders, sunglass holder, coin tray and other areas; a lockable glove box of usable size; and visor extenders.

There's also a Lexuslike obsession with spring-damped releases to covers on the coin/ash tray and a storage compartment just above. Both doors open at the same rate of travel.

And then there is the detail to the vent controls, both a wheel to adjust the rate of flow and a slider for left to right. Instead of just a simple slider tab or a plastic wheel with ridges for thumb traction, these have a ribbed rubber strip that provides a more civilized finger grip.

It costs money to add these details and not even all luxury carmakers go to such effort and expense.

Safety features include six air bags and a full line of electronic stability controls. Also new for a Kia are Hill Start Assist Control, which helps prevent the vehicle from rolling backward when pulling away on a hill, and Downhill Brake Control, which helps keep the vehicle moving straight and steady down steep grades. The electronic Torque-on-Demand four-wheel-drive system distributes power to the wheels with traction.

Borrego also debuts Kia's first voice-activated navigation system, with a rear seat entertainment package with an 8-inch widescreen television.

Amid all its refinement and advanced technology, I experienced one random electronic "event" in the V-8 tester.

On startup, the controlling electronic system went into "limp-home" mode. Red telltales glowed in the gauge cluster and while the vehicle had steering and braking functions, the transmission was engaged in second or third gear. I stopped a block later, restarted and normalcy returned.

A Kia spokesman said it is a rare but not unheard of anomaly. "The other reported incident also was a V-8, so that is of interest to us," he said.

Still, for a South Korean company that got its start in this country advertising vehicles that could be run hard and thrown away, Borrego is a barometer of how far this company has evolved.

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