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2009 Kia Sedona **Tops in safety, low in price.**

Overview

The Kia Sedona has just about everything the Honda Odyssey has, except the reputation, for a lot less money. Based on our observations, Toyota and Honda do have an edge on quality, ride and handling, but the Sedona is a compelling value in this class, offering convenience, comfort, style and performance.

From the outside, the Sedona looks classy and stylish. Inside, there's seven-passenger seating with seats that easily collapse to create a vast cargo space. Every cabin convenience known to man is either standard or available. Storage space is everywhere you turn, and there are no fewer than 14 cup holders.

The Sedona has achieved a five-star crash rating in all seating positions from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and earned a Top Safety Pick rating from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).

Kia says it designed the Sedona by studying other minivans, choosing the best features, and improving them. The Sedona engine, for example, is a modern V6 tuned to 250 horsepower and 253 pound-feet of torque. That's more than a match for the Honda Odyssey's 244 hp and 240 pound-feet. And, just like the Odyssey, the Sedona backs up that power with a responsive five-speed automatic transmission and a sophisticated suspension.

The Sedona was all-new for 2006. For 2009, Sirius Satellite Radio capability, with auxiliary, MP3 and USB connectivity, is standard on all three trim levels, with three months of complimentary service. There is also an optional navigation system, available on the EX trim level.

Model Lineup

The 2009 Kia Sedona is offered in two wheelbase lengths. Both seat seven, with the shorter, SWB version giving up mostly luggage space, and a little passenger space in both the second and third rows. The short version comes in a single trim level. The long-wheelbase (LWB) version comes in two trim levels.

The Sedona SWB (\$21,245) comes with cloth upholstery, two rows of two captain's chairs, and a removable 50/50-split bench in back. The first two rows get power windows; third-row windows tilt out manually. Three-zone climate control also comes standard, along with power locks with remote keyless entry, two 12-volt power outlets, intermittent wipers front and rear, privacy glass, eight-speaker CD sound system with auxiliary input jack, cruise control, tilt steering wheel,

overhead console, and 16-inch tires on steel wheels. Options include a Convenience Package (\$300) consisting of roof rails and carpeted floor mats; roof-rail cross bars (\$200); and just the floor mats (\$150).

The Sedona LWB LX (\$24,245) gets upgraded cloth upholstery and a full heated front windshield, along with additional space in both the second and third rows. The 60/40-split third row folds flat into the floor, instead of being removable. Optional are a trailer hitch (\$375), and a DVD entertainment system (\$1,200) with two wireless headsets and remote. A Power Package (\$1,000) includes dual sliding power doors and a back-up warning system.

The Sedona LWB EX (\$27,745) comes with an even more deluxe cloth interior and adds power front seats, leather-wrapped steering wheel, power rear quarter windows, automatic headlamps, fog lights, heated side mirrors, roof rails, dual power sliding doors, solar-control windshield, self-dimming rearview mirror, Homelink garage door opener, trip computer with compass, illuminated vanity mirrors, a cargo net, and 17-inch alloy wheels with lower-profile tires.

Options for Sedona EX include the Luxury Package (\$2,400) with leather upholstery, heated front seats, power adjustable pedals, a memory function (for seats, pedals, and mirrors), automatic climate control, steering-wheel-mounted audio controls, sunroof, back-up warning system, and an engine immobilizer; and the Premium Entertainment Package (\$1,500), consisting of a 660-watt stereo with 7.1 Surround Sound, 13 Infinity speakers, and an auxiliary input jack, and a DVD player with eight-inch monitor, two wireless headsets, and remote. Navigation is available (\$1,600), but navigation and the Premium Entertainment Package cannot be ordered together. Safety features include frontal airbags (the front passenger airbag turns itself off if a child is in the seat), side-impact airbags (for torso protection) for front-seat passengers, side-curtain airbags (for head protection) for the outboard passengers in all three rows of seats, and anti-whiplash active headrests in front. Also standard are electronic stability control with traction control, anti-lock brakes with electronic brake-force distribution (ABS with EBD) and brake assist, and a tire-pressure monitor

Walkaround

It's not easy for any minivan to be distinctive, and if the Sedona's styling isn't unique, it is clean and crisp, and classy. Its heart is European, and that influence spreads to its handsome styling.

The sheet metal has been carefully sculpted. A crease tapers down from the steeply sloping windshield to the grille, falling between the big wedge-shaped headlights and the small sharp corners of two horizontal grille openings, long black slots with a single chrome strip in each, and Kia badge in center. The fascia/bumper under the grille is thick, with an air intake having cage-like slats to keep out stones. Tidy fog lamps on the EX surround the intake, inside cavities that sweep up at the corners to match the lines of the headlamps.

The wheelwell flares are nicely done. They don't go out of their way to be noticed, by being bigger than they need to be; they carry just the right squared-off but smooth edges. They're sculpted by the same knife that carved the beltline running from the headlamps to taillights. The

standard six-spoke, 16-inch wheel covers are nothing special, but the 10-spoke, 17-inch alloys that come with the EX are beautiful and elegant, sending a message that this minivan has style.

The sides of the Sedona aren't too busy, given all they have to do; dings are caught by a low, thick, body-colored horizontal strip, and there's a necessary slot under each third window for the sliding rear doors. The trailing edge of that third window matches the modest slope of the roofline.

The rear view is functional, with a big rear window and taillights whose shape matches the lines of the rest of the vehicle. From the rear, the Sedona lacks style; it could be any minivan.

The shorter, SWB version rides a wheelbase of only 113.8 inches, which is 5.1 inches shorter than the more popular LWB models. At 189.4 inches overall, the SWB is 12.6 inches shorter, bumper-to-bumper, than the LWB versions. All of this length seems to have come out of the Sedona's hindquarters, which are noticeably stubbier in the shortie version. There's far less wraparound to the rear bumper; the slot for the sliding rear door almost reaches the tail light, and the rear wheel tucks up tighter against the rear edge of the sliding side door. The shorter minivan's greenhouse seems proportioned just right for a compact station wagon, although of course the lower portion of the vehicle remains mini-van tall. Overall, the chop job has been very well handled, with little compromise in Sedona's appearance.

Interior Features

Kia's approach to designing the Sedona, copying and bettering the competition, is reflected in the interior. It's a cohesive improvement of all that's out there.

The Kia Sedona driver feels like the master of her or his domain, looking down on the vast and functional center stack with all its controls, including a big leather-wrapped shift knob. This is a much better location for the shifter than between the seats. The center stack in our fully loaded EX was finished in a soft, dark simulated wood that looks way better than the hard, shiny real wood found in many luxury cars. All the main controls are there, and are mostly easy-to-operate square black buttons with easily-read white lettering. Air vents are black and business-like. The EX has more controls on the steering wheel (audio and cruise control) and driver's door, including the metaphorical power seat adjustment in the shape of a seat, copied from Mercedes-Benz.

With the center stack containing all the controls, plus the first two of a total of 14 cup holders (one for each hand of each passenger), the space between the front seats is used for a sideways flip-up tray/console, containing the third, fourth, fifth and sixth cup holders.

The power seat extends farther back than the standard manual-adjustment seat, offering more legroom. We co-drove an LX with a six-foot-four fellow whose legs were cramped in the manual seat. The cloth interior in the LX was okay, too, but the gray leather in our own test model EX was beautiful and supple, and the front seats provided excellent bolstering.

The three-zone climate control system offers separate temperature settings for driver, passenger, and rear-seat passengers. Climate control is fully automatic in the EX.

The windows along the second row lower and raise at the press of a button, giving your passengers real live fresh air, should they want. The optional power sliding doors and liftgate, triggered on the instrument panel or remote key fob, are a wonderful convenience.

The Sedona comes with captain's chairs in the second row. Second-row legroom in the long-wheelbase models is a generous 40.9 inches. The SWB model maintains the same second-row head and hip room, but legroom shrinks to 37.0 inches.

Third-row bench seating is standard on all models. In LWB versions the third row is split 60/40 and folds into the floor.

The LWB Sedona offers 32.2 cubic feet of cargo space behind the third-row seat. This area is recessed like the trunk of a car, so grocery bags won't slide around as much.

The second-row seats fold, but not flat. Press a button and each seatback folds down and then the seat flips up so it squeezes against the front seatback. For maximum cargo space, the second-row seats can be easily removed, creating a carpeted cargo van with 142 cubic feet of cargo space.

The SWB model comes with an older-style 50/50-split rear seat that must be removed and stored in your garage to maximize cargo space. Third-row passengers in the SWB lose nearly an inch of hip room and nearly two inches of head room when compared with the popular long-wheelbase models. Also, cargo space behind the third row is just 12.9 cubic feet. Remove the second and third rows and the SWB model offers 121 cubic feet of carpeted cargo space.

Cubby storage in the Sedona includes two glove compartments, one in the face of the dash, and a larger one at knee level, containing a bin, a big slot for CDs, and a hole for a cell phone. There is a flip-down compartment at the very bottom of the center stack big enough for CDs. There's a sunglasses holder overhead, wide door pockets, and compartments for the second- and third-row passengers. And there are cup holders for everyone.

Visibility rearward from the driver's seat is especially good, an important contribution to safety, because the rear window is as big as it can be, and the headrests over the five rear seats sink down to the tops of the seats. And if there are kids back there, there's a convex mirror on the headliner so you can keep an eye on them.

Our EX was equipped with the \$1,500 Premium Entertainment Package, including a DVD player and 13-speaker Infinity audio system. We expected some sensational Surround Sound, but were disappointed in the richness, depth and volume of the system, whether playing the radio or CDs.

Driving Impressions

The Kia Sedona is enjoyable to drive, with a tight, European-feeling independent suspension, using MacPherson struts in front and a multi-link system in the rear. The ride has a solid, steady, quality feel, no matter the road surface.



A 3.8-liter V6 powers the Sedona, a double overhead-cam engine with an aluminum block and heads and variable valve timing. A pretty racy setup, in other words, producing 250 horsepower and 253 pound-feet of torque. A smooth five-speed automatic transmission is also standard, and features a manual mode called Sportmatic.

We drove a fully optioned EX for four days, from San Diego east into the desert, and back over remote winding roads. We left town with the Friday getaway crowd, going with the flow at 85 miles per hour, and the engine smoothly kept pace with the speedy Californians, just loping along at 2600 rpm while getting nearly 20 miles per gallon. The Sedona was stable in crosswinds at that speed, past the churning windmills near Palm Springs. We let it run up to 95 once, and it was steady, smooth and quiet.

Ample use of aluminum reduces weight in the Sedona, which improves handling, acceleration and fuel economy. But the Sedona is no lightweight, and it didn't always feel like it had 253 pound-feet of torque. The five-speed automatic transmission kicked down a lot under pressure, as, for example, when running up a long steep grade with the cruise control set at 79 miles per hour.

On the way back to the city, over a twisty two-lane, the Sedona was impressive in the curves, with power rack-and-pinion steering. The Sedona surprised us here. We drove it with a lot more spirit than your average minivan pilot, and found the turn-in to the corners to be precise, with no false moves. The suspension kept pace with our cornering, allowing very little body lean. The only minor chink in the Sedona's armor appeared when zooming over a rise in the road, beginning at maybe 45 miles per hour, but, when the Sedona settled, it stuck with no wallow. At the other end of the road, in the dips, it felt just fine.

We used the disc brakes hard and they felt as good as the suspension.

The Sportmatic manual mode in the transmission was a pleasure. We have the feeling that drivers designed the Sedona: We downshifted for corners and manually upshifted, and the transmission did exactly what we asked it to do, and rarely any more. The lever fit nicely in the heel of our hand.

The engine sometimes sounded a bit harsh under hard acceleration at low rpm, but now we're nitpicking, which is a compliment of sorts, because that's what happens with high-quality vehicles. At idle, it's so quiet that we once tried to start it when it was already running.

Summary

The Kia Sedona is a great-looking minivan with a powerful V6 engine and a suspension that's second to none. The interior is well thought out, with seven-passenger seating but easily convertible to a carpeted cargo van. And there's an abundance of storage compartments. The Sedona lacks nothing, except the option of all-wheel drive.



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