



Stinger a showstopper

Kia designers don't know how to make a dud. Just look at the vehicle lineup. No ugly ducklings to be found. Even the Rondo, once homely as a mutant potato, is burnished to a new shine.



Kathy Renwald

Now the newest wave maker, the Stinger, is topping the charts in the looks, performance and price categories.

When it was just a sketch on the drafting table, Kia bosses gave the green light for the Stinger to take on the BMW 3 Series. Big dreams for sure, but bolstered by big talent at Kia.

Peter Schreyer left Audi to be design boss at Kia and has power-washed the frumpiness out of the vehicle lineup. The Stinger also has the fingerprints of engineer Albert Biermann all over it. He arrived at Kia from the M sport division of BMW.

So, with that powerful energy, the Stinger arrived fresh as a debutante to take on the establishment.

Right away, give top marks to styling. The Stinger looks tough and elegant at the same

time with its fast back and grand touring lines. From all angles it exudes confidence and balance, qualities that make it as good or better looking than a BMW. Just a few months after its debut, the Stinger won the Red Dot design award for its bold and innovative design.

I was surprised that during a week of test-driving, friends who rarely notice cars thought the Stinger was gorgeous.

The proportions, detailing and finishing read expensive, but it's not out of line. I tested the top-of-the-line GT Limited. Fully loaded, it costs just over \$50,000. The entry level model starts at \$44,000, but it's worth splurging on the top banana. The GT version comes with an excellent Harman Kardon audio system, premium leather

2018 KIA STINGER

Base Price: \$44,000
Price as Tested: \$50,000
Engine Type: V6 3.3-litre twin turbo
Power: 365 hp
Torque: 376 lb.-ft.
Fuel Consumption
City: 12.7 L/100 km
Highway: 9.6 L/100 km
What's Best: Muscular looks, sharp performance, price
What's Worst: Interior needs a splash more style
What's Interesting: Not afraid to take on BMW 3 series

seats, eight-inch multimedia interface with navigation, smart cruise control and 360 camera monitoring.

Both models share the same important fundamentals: a V6 3.3-litre twin-turbo engine that produces 365 horsepower and 376 lb.-ft of torque, paired with a snappy eight-speed automatic transmission.

Right out of the parking lot, the Stinger feels right. It has precise steering with alert and eager acceleration, chewing-gum-sticky braking and flat handling that makes for smug driving on twisty roads.

Canadian Stingers in GT trim come standard with all-wheel drive. Cold-weather handling underwent two months of testing

in icy Sweden. Even in tame southern Ontario, the road surfaces vary from glassy smooth to cratered to gravel, and for those variations the Stinger handling can be modified via five driving modes: Sport, Comfort, Smart, Eco and Custom.

Comfort does a good job at buffering passengers from bad pavement, and Sport, of course, lets loose the true competitive nature of the Stinger, along with enhanced engine sound.

At first glance the interior of the Stinger makes a solid impression, with a simple, fluid layout and clear organization. The seats fit well and have the required sporty bolsters, the backseat is roomy and dials and switches feel well made.

But it falls a few notches short of luxurious. The brushed aluminum of the centre console is underwhelming, and there is no tidy cover for the cup holders. It's a shade too austere to make you fall in love. Also, drivers familiar with BMW and Audi will find the cabin of the Stinger noisier than the German competitors.

The infotainment setup and climate controls, however, are pure magic, as they often are in Kias. There are no bewildering menus to perform simple tasks, usually just a twist of the dial or the poke of a finger will complete an action. If only other automakers could emulate the simplicity of the Kia system.

I thought the safety features, such as lane keeping and adaptive cruise control, were excellent and the 360-degree camera views very handy when backing the Stinger into tight spaces.

The Kia Stinger really is a superstar. The drive, the looks and the price are unassailable. Is that enough to pry drivers out of the BMW 3 Series? Who knows, but I bet anyone who snuggled up to a Stinger wouldn't be disappointed. 

Kathy Renwald is an award-winning automotive writer, photographer and videographer.

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