

What goes around comes around

Is Mazda bringing back the rotary engine?

PAGE 2



Big in Japan

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PAGE 3



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PAGE 2



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Models going bye-bye next year

PAGE 2

TEST DRIVE

Reconsider

First Drive: 2018 Kia Stinger

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Special to the Times Union

Anyone trying to sell anything has to concern themselves with image. Companies go to great lengths to build and cultivate a brand. Once established, attempts to alter that identity come with risk. There's always a certain percentage of the public that, when confronted with change, recoils, preferring to keep the (person, product, company...) in the same mental file drawer that they've already assigned it to.



While their current lineup is far ranging, Kia built their reputation on the backs of small cars. The model that put this company on the radar for many people is the Soul — a funky, boxy compact introduced in the 2010 model year. Now, along comes Stinger — a sleek, Grand Touring sedan. It's about as far removed from Soul as you can get.

First Drive: 2018 Kia Stinger
MSRP: \$31,900 - \$51,400

Then again, not. Both are big time departures from what we thought the company was about.

Stinger traces its roots to the GT Concept, which first appeared on the show circuit in 2011. A Grand Touring or Grand Turismo car is a premium vehicle, built to cover ground quickly and comfortably. The job description calls for distinctive styling. Stinger checks that box with a sinewy shape. The five-door liftback has a long hood and short, fastback roofline. Windshield



THE KIA STINGER is a new model for 2018, a five-passenger fastback sedan in the style of a grand touring premium vehicle. It's powered by either a 2.0-liter twin-scroll turbocharged four-cylinder or a 3.3-liter twin turbo V6.

and backlight are steeply raked, and wheels are pulled to the corners. The front end is aggressive looking (if a bit busy). In profile or ¾ views, the car is inarguably a head-turner: long, low and slippery looking. The sloping, sporty back end is capped by a modest ducktail spoiler on the decklid. The wind-cheating tail is a happily understated alternative to a rear wing (though those who want the winged look will have to look no further than the aftermarket to get one). Beneath the skin, a belly pan covers the undercarriage, further spurning aero disturbances. Kia says the Stinger has a Coefficient of drag of .30.

If slippery is as slippery does, then the chassis beneath had best be tight. Stinger's Engineering development included 6,000 miles of testing on Germany's fabled Nurburgring race course — part of nearly 100,000 total miles of on-road testing and tuning for the car. Chassis stiffness is enhanced by extensive use (55 percent) of high strength steel. The standard

suspension is passive: MacPherson struts, five-link rear. GT models sport Kia's first continuously-damping electronically-controlled suspension. Five drive modes can be selected in GT trim Stingers — Comfort, Custom, Eco, Smart and Sport — accessible via center console knob.

I don't get the impression that Stinger would be phased by a good 'ol New York pothole.

Switching to Sport mode in an AWD equipped model adjusts five driving parameters: steering heft, shift points, suspension settings, throttle response and (in AWD cars) power distribution. AWD-equipped models in Sport mode switch the distribution of power to a more RWD-based starting point, then feed torque fore and aft, left and right as needed, to maximize grip. Up to 50 percent of available power can be channeled to the front; up to 80 percent can be shifted to the back tires.

My test drive was conducted mainly over a selection of southern California's renowned canyon roads, along

Continued on page 2

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