

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

2023 Kia Niro PHEV

Base MSRP: \$26,590 (Hybrid) \$33,840 (PHEV) \$39,550 (EV) As Tested: \$41,635 (PHEV SX Touring)



The second generation of Kia's Niro makes its debut this year. The four door hatchback is offered in three models, distinguished by powertrain: hybrid (HEV), plug-in hybrid (PHEV) or electric (EV). The Hybrid (MSRP \$26,590) combines a 1.6L four cylinder engine with a 32kW electric motor. With a combined output of 139 h.p. and 195 lb.-ft.

of torque, it's expected to return an estimated 53 miles per gallon (combined), and have a driving range of 588 miles. The Plug-In Hybrid (MSRP \$33,840) couples the 1.6L four with a larger (62kW) electric motor, resulting in 180 h.p., and 195 lb.-ft. of torque. The maximum AER (all-electric range) is 33 miles, with an MPGe of 108. Finally, the all-electric Niro draws power from a 64.8 kW battery along with a 150kW (201 h.p.) electric motor. The estimated AER is 588 miles. My test drive was in the Plug-In Hybrid, which had an as-tested price of \$41,635.

As the numbers suggest, the PHEV is the mid-range Niro, power-wise. The 180 horsepower supplies enough oomph for all typical driving situations (0-60 mph in low to mid 7 second range). Drivers can opt to run on strictly electric power or a combination of gas and electric. If the former, the estimated 33 miles may cover the daily commute for some, without touching the contents of the gas tank. Regenerative braking can be employed to stretch your electric range. It's adjustable by means of the steering wheel mounted paddles. Brake pedal feel is smooth, showing no signs of the system's multitasking. I've not driven Niro's Hybrid or EV siblings, but I can make some



Photos courtesy of the manufacturer



deductions based on their output. The Hybrid version's 139 horsepower figures to translate into more leisurely performance than the PHEV, (I've seen 0-60 times quoted in the nine second range), but (as noted above), that's balanced by some sparkling numbers for mpg's and driving range. The EV has the most brawn of the bunch, and will get to 60 from a standstill about a half second quicker than the PHEV. Its estimated range is 253 miles, but it's the highest priced of the trio, and has a single (electric) power source. Propulsion aside, Niro's driving doesn't shout sportiness, but it holds corners nicely and rides agreeably. All three Niros should be more alike than different in this regard. Front wheel drive is standard on all models, and there's no AWD option.

This generation of Niro is longer than the one it replaces (+3.5"). The difference is most noticeable in back. Rear seat leg room increases from 37.4" to 39.8", which is enough room for a pair of six footers to fit, with like size folks in front. Cargo capacity remains essentially the same as last year: 19.4- 54.6 cu/-ft., depending on how you configure the seating, and the liftover height in back is comfortably low for loading. The front cabin's new design has a fresh look, and is comfortably appointed for its class. The controls for HVAC and infotainment share the same real estate, midway up the center stack. Both sets of functions use the same access point, and the touch sensitive controls don't respond well to winter gloved hands. As a result, it takes longer to make many routine adjustments (like temperature, fan controls, etc.) than it would with a different design.

The Niro Hybrid offers impressive mileage, tempered by modest performance. Niro PHEV costs more, but adds more standard features, more power, and (provided you keep it charged) gives you the option to take a 30 mile reprieve from gas station stops.

A 40 year resident of the Capital District, Dan Lyons is the author of six automotive books, and photographer of more than 200 calendars.