

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

## 2023 Kia Sportage Hybrid

**Base MSRP: \$27,490 (LX) As Tested: \$38,155 (SX-Prestige AWD)**



Sportage highlights its fifth generation with a first. The 2023 edition of this Kia compact crossover includes its first hybrid and plug-in hybrid versions. Sportage slots in between Niro and Sorento in Kia's lineup. Three trim levels of the Sportage Hybrid are offered: LX, EX and SX Prestige. My test car was an SX Prestige, with an as-delivered price of \$38,155.

This is a full redesign for Sportage, not a refresh. It's bigger in every dimension than the outgoing model. Seen in profile, the basic body shape is classic crossover: part wagon, part Sport Ute. It's capped on both ends by edgy styling - particularly the bold front view - which helps it stand out in a crowded field of quality competitors. My test car wore a coat of Matte Gray paint - a \$595 option that lends a custom look.

Bigger outside means bigger inside, which translates in Sportage to more room for people and their stuff. Cargo capacity is 39.5- 73.7 cu.-ft., which is in the front row for this class. Rear seatbacks fold flat, and the liftover height for loading is low. Rear seat legroom measures 41.3": six footers fit comfortably, with like size folks in front of them. The front cabin has a progressive look to it, particularly when equipped with the available, large display instrument panel and center touchscreen. Here as in some other Kia models, 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, so you must first switch between two, main panels of controls, before drilling down



*Photos courtesy of the manufacturer*



to make your change. The added step means it takes longer to make many routine adjustments than it would with a different design. (More so in winter, because the touch sensitive controls are slow to respond to winter gloved fingers). Blind spot detection is standard, starting on mid level EX. SX Prestige adds blind spot view monitors (embedded in the instrument panel display) and a surround view monitor. The latter, bird's-eye view camera system eases backing/parking considerably. It's a desirable safety feature that I've not seen offered before in this segment.

The increase in size seems also to have benefitted ride quality. The new Sportage cruises comfortably, and handles competently. Braking is similarly smooth, and that's worth noting. Brake systems in hybrids must multitask, and smooth pedal feel is sometimes a casualty of this process. Not so here. Sportage buyers choose from three, propulsion options: gas powered, plug-in hybrid, or hybrid, like my test car. Sportage Hybrid employs a 1.6L turbocharged, four cylinder gas engine matched with a 44kW electric motor, a 1.49kW lithium-ion battery and a six-speed automatic transmission. The combined, hybrid system output is 227 horsepower and 258 lb.-ft. of torque. It's a nice fit in this platform,. Power flows evenly, with plenty on tap for passing or on-ramp merges. The 28 mpg's that I recorded during my test drive falls short of the EPA fuel economy estimates (38/38/38 AWD).

Comfortable and spacious for its class, Sportage raises its game in its fifth generation debut. It will need all of it, competing it what's arguably the hottest segment in autodom.

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