

# A Stylish Crossover Vehicle For Kia

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Kia is planning to bring to the American market a new type of vehicle – a seven passenger crossover – that will compete against the likes of the Toyota Matrix and the Dodge Caliper. The Kia Carens will be sold later this year in Europe and will likely make it to the U.S. market as the Kia Rondo at about the same time. Demand for crossovers continues to rise as the market adjusts to this relatively new type of vehicle. Will the Rondo succeed? If early press reports are any indication then the answer is yes.

Kia's aggressive surge on the world scene is being made evident through new or proposed factories in Europe and in Georgia, USA. As a subsidiary of the mighty Hyundai group, Kia has long stood for being the budget Korean brand while Hyundai is the company's value brand. The proposed Rondo will continue Kia's tradition of providing decent quality small vehicles for prices that are thousands of dollars less than the competition.

Importantly, the Rondo crossover will fit nicely into a category of vehicles that have yet to take the U.S. by storm: mini-minivans. Popular in Europe, these compact vans are much smaller than current American minivans, yet still able to hold as many as 7 adults. With three passenger row seating, the Rondo and others like it squeeze out every possible square inch of interior space to accommodate passengers. No, you won't ride in luxury and the ride itself will be closer to a Corolla than to a Camry, but Kia is banking on consumers wanting a well appointed 7 passenger vehicle that will likely retail for under \$20,000. No vehicle currently offered in the U.S. can claim to carry that many people for that small of a price. Clearly, Kia aims to be the first company to accomplish that feat.

Unlike most upcoming vehicles, Kia is holding information about the Rondo close to the vest. With China's Chery also preparing to send a similar vehicle to the U.S., Kia's reticence is certainly understandable. Why give the competition more information than what is necessarily needed at this point in the game?

Likely, a pair of gas powered four cylinder engines mated to various manual and automatic transmissions will power the Rondo. No diesel version has been discussed for the U.S. market, but one is possible for European motorists.

In addition, look for Kia to offer better standard equipment choices with the Rondo than previous models have offered including, standard side and head air bags, dual zone air conditioning, and possibly all wheel drive on a premium model.

Yes, Kia is no longer just a producer of cheap subcompacts. With the soon to arrive Rondo, Kia is attempting to expand its growing line by offering a vehicle like no other one on the market. **Copyright 2006** – Matt Keegan is a freelance automotive writer covering the classics, new models, and industry trends. You can maintain your car – domestic or foreign -- with the help of high quality auto parts from APC, Hella, and PIAA.