

DOCTOR ON THE ROAD: KIA NIRO EV

# Niro is no emperor



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The Niro comes in many guises. Will *Independent Practitioner* Today's motoring correspondent **Dr Tony Rimmer** give his test car the thumbs up, or the thumbs down?

AS WE know in our medical work, there is often more than one solution to any particular problem and each will have its own strengths and weaknesses. In many cases, various combinations of surgery and medical therapy can be used to best effect for any particular patient's individual needs. As medic car buyers, we also have very individual needs and situations. We may want to join the increasing band of electric vehicle (EV) drivers for noble environmental reasons, but are thwarted by circumstances. The lack of a drive or designated parking space if we live in a city will make home charging almost impossible. If we then must rely on the external public charging network, it becomes much less convenient and far more expensive.

We are then looking at self-charging petrol hybrid models and plug-in hybrids. They are cheaper to buy than full electric EVs and allow more flexibility for refueling and recharging needs. **Mid-life update** Some manufacturers offer all variants of the same model which, although being an engineering compromise, allows the customer to fulfil their individual requirements. Such a car is the Kia Niro and it has recently been given a mid-life update by the Korean brand. It is available as a 139bhp 1.6 litre petrol hybrid for £27,745, a 180bhp plug-in 1.6 litre petrol hybrid for £33,525 and a 201bhp full electric version for £36,245. There are three trim levels to each model: Levels 2, 3 and 4. I have been testing the £38,995

Level 3 EV which offers the optimum trim level and value for this all-electric Kia. The 65kWh battery promises a range of up to 285 miles. This is about the same as is claimed by VW for the standard iD3 and MG for its MG4. The revised styling has smartened up the exterior of the Niro with a more futuristic front end and the potential for some contrasting-coloured bodywork behind the rear doors; reminiscent of the 'side blades' on the Audi R8 sports car. **Good space** However, this is no sports car. It is a roomy five-seater hatchback with good space for rear seat passengers. Because it shares a platform and bodyshell with its petrol hybrid siblings, this EV version has space



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under the bonnet for extra storage – a good place to keep the recharging cables. The updated interior uses good-quality materials and the controls are straightforward and clear. It feels more solidly built than before and better than its rivals too. There has obviously been some real thought given to passenger convenience, with good storage pockets and individual USB sockets on the backs of the front seats. Boot space is a generous 475 litres with a flat floor for easy loading. **Excellent visibility** Out on the road, the Niro EV is as sprightly as expected. The steering is light and direct and visibility is excellent from a slightly elevated driving position. As it shares its chassis with its hybrid siblings, the Niro is front-

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wheel drive, which means that the turning circle is less than its iD3 and MG4 rear-drive competitors. The brake regeneration can be altered through four strengths and, on the highest strength, allows almost one-pedal driving. All the usual driver safety features are standard, but the lane assist function is quite intrusive and when you turn it off in the infotainment menu, it annoyingly

defaults to being on again when you restart the car for your next journey. This is a feature common to all VW EVs too, but not the MG4 where it remains off when turned off. **Road noise** Performance is swift, perfect for the urban cut and thrust, and the ride is soft and comfortable. Although engine noise is absent, road noise is a little intrusive at motorway speeds. Handling is fine but not dynamic enough to entertain the keen driver. As you can gather, I found the Niro a perfectly good companion for fulfilling all the practical functions demanded of a family car but lacking any real character. Pure EVs are still only really

suited to city/urban living where home-charging is available. The real-world range of 200 miles which this Niro and its direct competitors offer is just right for this sort of use. Kia's solid build quality and standard seven-year warranty – only matched by MG – is also a strong selling point. However, if you are a medic who is not yet convinced about the suitability of all-electric vehicles to your lifestyle or needs, then you could still consider the cheaper hybrid or plug-in hybrid versions. **Dr Tony Rimmer** (right) is a former NHS GP practising in Guildford, Surrey



| KIA NIRO EV '3'                                  |
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| Body: Five-door hatchback                        |
| Engine: Single electric motor. Front-wheel drive |
| Power: 201bhp                                    |
| Torque: 255Nm                                    |
| Top speed: 103mph                                |
| Acceleration: 0-62mph in 7.8 seconds             |
| WLTP claimed range: 285 miles                    |
| CO <sub>2</sub> emissions: 0g/km                 |
| On-the-road price: £39,895                       |

