

Did you ever pack up the family sedan and head off on an out-of-state vacation? When I was young, that was a regular event most summers. And the Great American Sedans of my youth were big, heavy Dodges and Fords that floated along the highway with a cushy ride but also suffered from cumbersome handling on winding roads.

Driving the new Kia *Amanti* recalled those big sedans, but it's a far better car in every way. The *Amanti* is a large (Lexus LS430-size) near-luxury front wheel drive four-door sedan that has just enough "float" in its ride to make you want to hit the freeways this summer, yet certainly handles better than the big sedans of yesteryear.

By current standards, it's soft. But that's by design. Suspension settings, engine power levels, steering, tire choice, and braking response are biased towards those who will rarely seek to push the limits. In exchange, you get a very comfortable car that also happens to possess amenities not typically available at its price.

All *Amantis* are equipped with a 3.5L 24-valve DOHC V6 engine. With just 200 horsepower pushing a car weighing 4,000 pounds, the *Amanti* may seem underpowered to some. Kia compensates with quick throttle tip-in, which simply means that a little pedal feeds a lot of fuel. While helping the *Amanti* feel livelier, it also makes for a touchy gas pedal. You may have to retrain your right foot to press ever so slightly when leaving from stoplights so as not to suddenly lurch forward.

A 5-speed automatic is the only transmission offered, and it contains a Sportmatic feature that allows for manual control of upshifts and downshifts.

The *Amanti*'s handsome interior is inviting, with optional leather seating surfaces, perhaps the best faux-wood trim around, and a refined, upscale feel. Its optional Infinity stereo that includes both cassette and 6-CD changer sounds great. Rear seat legroom is quite generous, and there are enough 12-volt plug-in recepta-



### *Kia Amanti*

## Recalling the Great American Sedan

cles to let you shave, vacuum the floor mats and mix up some fruit smoothies all at the same time (but not while driving, please!).

On the outside, the *Amanti* has a "formal" look to its body shapes and roofline, including nicely rounded headlight surrounds tapering back into the hood. It's a well-integrated design, with only the overly large front grille looking a bit awkward.

Driving the *Amanti* demonstrated the biases mentioned earlier. When pushed harder on winding roads, the




225/60x16 Hankook tires protested with a soft squeal announcing that its limits were near. Under less demanding conditions, grip is decent and the Hankooks give a soft, quiet ride. Just what most *Amanti* buyers will want. I did, however, increase tire air pressure from the recommended 30 psi to 34, which sharpened handling just a bit.

Acceleration, like the handling,

should satisfy most buyers. The transmission downshifts willingly and early, to help keep the engine at optimum power levels when passing or tackling steeper hills. That, with the aforementioned quick throttle tip-in, helps compensate for an engine with modest power.

The *Amanti* is EPA rated at 17-city, 25-highway mpg. A week's worth of city, freeway and mountain road driving gave me an average of 17.7 mpg. Base price for the *Amanti* is \$24,995. This well-equipped example which included the Infinity stereo upgrade, sunroof, heated front seats, leather, seat and mirror memory and more totaled \$28,260 including destination fees. A complete complement of air bags is standard, as is one of the longest warranties around. Even five-year roadside assistance is included.

*Amanti* is a lot of car for the money. It excels at long trips, freeway commutes, and whenever you want to carry a group of four in above-average comfort. Kia is obviously working hard to build a solid reputation, and the *Amanti* represents a genuine milestone in that quest. Value-conscious shoppers may be pleasantly surprised by what awaits at the nearest Kia dealer. 

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