



Two new 2010 models from Kia—the Forte and Soul—will be giving their Japanese and American small-car competition a real run for the money. Both do a great job at fulfilling their respective roles. And it's clear that Kia has hired talented designers to make inexpensive cars attractive and stylish.

Kia's Forte is a compact 4-door sedan taking on cars like the Honda Civic, Toyota Corolla, and Ford Focus. A 2-door coupe will soon join the sedan.

The Forte's exterior is a fine example of how to make a small car look sleek. It's smooth, tasteful and pleasing to the eye. Inside, it's again apparent that stylists took care in crafting designs and shapes that are both attractive and functional.

The seats were comfortable for a few hours at a time, and the material has a nice pattern. Front seat bolsters could be a bit more pronounced to hold you in place while cornering. My main wish, though, was for some increase in the seat bottom angle. They felt too horizontal to me, and at downhill stop signs I was sliding forward.

Two engines are available, a 2.0 and a 2.4 liter, along with a variety of transmissions. Mine had the 2.0 with 5-speed auto—a great combo for fuel economy. Part of the optional Fuel Economy Package, it's the way to go unless you've gotta have a stick shift.

Sharp curves demonstrated an ability to dig in and hold on pretty well. I was pleasantly surprised, considering its gas-saving tires. Acceleration showed decent punch for a 2-liter, and should be fine for most buyers.

Now for the Soul, and I've got to say "wow!" Here's a great design example of how to turn a box into something stylish and pleasing to look at...while still remaining a box. How'd they do that?

Well, just look at all the subtle details



2010 Kia Forte

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL COONEY

2010 Kia Forte and Soul + Kudos to Kia for Stylin' Home Runs

and you'll find outstanding design in every nook and corner. Take the lowly fender for example: three surface angles. The clear plastic cover over the tail lights. The subtle hood bulge. On and on it goes. The closer you look, the more you like.

The Soul is a friendly micro-SUV to drive. At just under 162 inches long, it's easy to park anywhere. At the same time, with rear seats folded, its cube-shaped cargo area is practical and can carry lots of stuff.

As with the Forte, the Soul's interior is both stylish and well laid out. The front seats, again, could use a bit more rake on the bottom cushion. The seat height adjuster should help most everyone find a good fit, though, for visibility and driving position.

My tester had the same engine as the


Forte I drove, and it performs well—thanks in part to the Soul's lower-than-average weight of just 2,830 pounds with



2010 Kia Forte

the 4-speed automatic. Still, I wish it had the Forte's 5-speed automatic available to lower the cruising rpm. The Forte ran 300 – 400 rpm lower than the Soul at freeway speeds.

This Forte is EPA rated at 27-city, 36-highway MPG. MSRP including optional fuel economy package and destination fees came to \$18,090. The Soul is EPA rated at 24-city, 30-highway MPG and was priced at \$17,890 including audio upgrade, power sunroof, fog lights, floor mats and destination fees.

Kia is clearly going all out to compete with Honda, Toyota, Ford, etc. in the compact segment, and is a brand worth a close look if you're shopping for value priced cars. And don't forget Kia's 5-year overall warranty and 10-year power train warranty. Visit www.kia.com for more. 

Mike Cooney is a lifelong auto enthusiast living and writing in Southern California. Comments are welcome at Michael@GlobalBrand.com.



2010 Kia Soul