

Kia Carens

Featured model: 1.8SX 5-seater



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆○○○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Safety	☆☆○○○
Handling/steering	☆☆○○○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Fuel economy	☆☆○○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1793cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 108bhp at 5750rpm, 112 lb ft at 4500rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.7 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 15.9 in 4th
suspension front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts, anti-roll bar
 Rear: coil spring/damper struts with multi-link location
steering hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.6m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.0m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear (discs all round and ABS only on GSX)
wheels/tyres 5½in steel with 185/65R14H tyres (Hankook Radial 866 on test car); full-size spare

LIKES ...

clearly visible warning lights
 powerful headlamps
 electric mirrors and windows (four)
 variable intermittent front wipers

and GRIPES

no intermittent rear wipe
 lazy tailgate struts
 no front roof/map-reading lamp
 trigger/key-only tailgate opening

THE CARENS RANGE

body upper-medium (budget-priced) tall estate and MPV
trim levels 5 or 6 seat SX, GSX
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/108bhp; diesel: none
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (automatic not available)

THE CARENS: IS IT A MID-SIZED MPV or a tall estate car? Actually it's either, depending on whether you opt for the six seater (with 2 + 2 + 2 seating) or the (2 + 3) five seater, as tested here.

With the six (costing a modest £300 extra) the rearmost seats double-fold to give plenty of load space, but with all three rows of seats occupied, suddenly there's room for only shopping bags.

As a five-seater, however, the Carens is not only able to swallow a lot of luggage (but see Space and Practicality overleaf), it's also roomier for all aboard. Headroom is lofty all round and rear leg-stretching space excellent, as indeed is the big reclining seat that offers something special in terms of spacious and supportive comfort. Don't expect any surprise and delight features, however; SX is Kia-speak for basic. The only option is metallic paint.

The car's performance is anything but basic, though. True there's no choice of engine – it's 1.8 petrol or lump it – but this is a game if decidedly audible (nay rowdy) unit that's a willing revver, with acceleration to match, or better, that of its rivals. And to be fair, it's a quiet enough cruiser. Pity the gearchange has a rather loose action, though – it works well, otherwise.

In fact, lightness is a feature of the controls, including the steering; it's easily manageable, but lacks any form of informative feedback. Cornering roll isn't excessive, and such is the Carens's benign

handling that it can be hurried along winding roads with reasonable verve.

Out on the main road the ride is good enough for you to forget to think about it; it's only on pock-marked surfaces that you realise it feels fidgety. Braking performance, handbrake apart, is no better than adequate, with ABS available only on the £2000-dearer GLX. But, of course, for this you also gain many more comfort and convenience items.

The Carens' generous headroom would allow the driver to sit higher, but only the steering wheel is adjustable for height. As it is, the driving position suits most people, although some complained of excessive thigh support and the absence of a left footrest. All-round vision is excellent (with the three rear head restraints removed), thanks to plenty of glass and big electric mirrors.

The general fit and finish, as well as the quality of the plastics, leave something to be desired, however.

VERDICT

Although not without its deficiencies and rough edges, this Carens SX is an honest, unpretentious estate which, for under £10,000, gives plenty of space and comfort, plus a lively turn of speed. If you don't need, or can't stretch to, a more sophisticated family holdall, it could be just the job. Don't forget to check out Citroën's versatile Multispace as well, though.

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>"Rough diamond" of an engine: rev it hard and it's raucous and unrefined, but a real go-er; quite sporty (spins to near 7000rpm). Quiet cruiser and tractable (if rather doleful) in 4th and 5th, too</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.4	8.9	13.4		
30-50mph	4.2	8.6	13.0		
40-60mph	5.3	9.1	12.9		
50-70mph	6.9	9.7	14.4		
30-70mph	11.1	18.3	27.4		
max speed in each gear (*using 6400rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	32	58	80	103	114

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★☆☆○○			
<i>Deep boot, but back seat doesn't slide, remove or even double-fold, so much of potentially huge luggage space unexploitable. High rear sill, too. Passenger space all round is excellent, however</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door estate)</i>		inside	(† with no sunroof)
outside		front - legroom	91-105
length	444	- headroom	100†
width - inc mirrors	196	rear - typical leg/	104
- mirrors folded	172	kneeroom	77
height (no roof bars)	160	- headroom	98
load sill height	22/73	- hiproom	126
		load space (all seats in use)	
		(litres/cu ft)	590/20.8
steering		load length	92-180
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	full length to fascia	267
turning circle (metres)	10.6	load width	94-130
easy to park/garage?		load height (to blind/	51/
	★☆☆☆☆	to top of aperture)	97

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★☆☆○○	
<i>Wheel-only height adjustment (not seat), but vision first class. Light (if loose) gearchange; no left footrest. Clear (blue!) dials, but the switches are scattered and radio/cassette controls are fiddly</i>	
	

SAFETY ★☆☆○○	
<i>Mediocre best stop, with no ABS to help out. Only a centre lap belt at rear and non-availability of side airbags do SX no favours, either. Five headrests, though. Immobiliser standard, but no alarm</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel	from 50 mph (without ABS)
in emergency	pedal load
handbrake	distance
	unhurried 10kg
	sudden 16kg
	+4kg ie 20kg
	44m
	29m best stop
	32m fronts locked

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Carens not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES		
central locking	✓	alarm
remote control	✗	immobiliser
auto window closure	✗	luggage security
deadlocks	✗	
	✓ standard	0 factory option ✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★☆☆○○	
<i>Quite easy to spin wheels in wet, but tyre grip good when cornering. Fail-safe understeery handling, not too much roll. Light steering lacks feel, but usefully compact turning circle helps when parking</i>	
	

COMFORT ★☆☆○○
<i>Suspension fretful only on broken tarmac, otherwise ride adequately absorbent. Almost too much thigh support for driver, but full marks for (reclining) back seat comfort/space. No sunroof or air conditioning</i>

FUEL ECONOMY ★☆☆○○	
<i>Fair-to-middling consumption with nearly 40mpg if you're gentle. Easy-filling tank with a tethered cap, yet range only fair. Highest tax band, but group 8 insurance; 3-year/60,000-mile warranty</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban)	20½
best (gentle/rural)	39
overall mpg on test	31
realistic tank capacity	48 litres
typical range	325 miles
urban	25.8
extra urban	39.5
combined	33.0
CO ₂ emissions	202 g/km
car tax band	D

HOW THE CARENS COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes - best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering (p) turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
KIA CARENS 1.8SX	4/1793/108	3380	11.1	27.4/18.3	31	29/16*	105	104/77	3.2/10.6	444
Citroën Multispace 1.6	4/1587/110	3240	11.5	32.7/23.3	37½	31/27*	107	99/77	3.2/11.3	411
Daewoo Tacuma 2.0	4/1998/119	3350	11.0	24.4/17.0	29	28½/20	103	103/77	3.0/10.4	435
Fiat Multipla 1.6	4/1581/103	3780	12.7	29.2/20.6	29	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Renault Scenic 1.6	4/1598/110	3465	12.0	28.2/19.3	34½	26/40	108	102/76	3.5/10.6	413
Vauxhall Zafira 1.8	4/1796/113	3630	11.3	22.4/16.3	32	27/14	103	102/75	3.2/11.0	432

*no ABS

(p) all power assisted