



KIA CARENS

The Captain's Chairs are the new first class

RAHBAR AL HAQ

As the demand for SUVs slowly engulfs the entire car market like a beast, more and more cars are catching the crossover mutation. Take the Suzuki Vitara Brezza for example, a Swift hatchback pumped full of helium to crossover size, or the DFSK Glory, a seven-seater MPV that fakes the look and luxury of a full-blown body-on-frame SUV.



PHOTOS: SAIKAT ROY

The Kia Carens is the latest recipient of that treatment, with the latest model ditching its proper minivan roots and embracing a more crossover-ish design. It's based on the stretched Seltos/Hyundai Creta platform and aimed primarily at India and other emerging markets.

And no, the 'Carens' nameplate isn't a tribute to your aunt Karen. According to Kia, the name is a blend of 'car' and 'Renaissance', as they believe this car will usher in a new age of family motoring. And honestly, with all the features packed into this Indian-made ride, it's hard to disagree. The Carens offers a lot for its price, defying expectations for a budget option.

Hot and futuristic

From a company that only made bland cars that nobody wanted to look at just ten years ago, the design of the new Carens is certainly stunning. Our press car, shimmering in Kia's aptly named 'Intense Red'. That hue was hotter than a stolen tamale under the blazing sun, and boy did it accentuate the curves of the fresh design. The front fascia was so futuristic that we half-expected KITT to speak out and ask us to take it for a spin. The sleek new Kia badge was flanked by some sleek LED daytime running lights (DRLs) and a black trim piece with a diamond texture acting as the front grille. Tucked away under the DRLs are the actual headlights' a massive meshed opening at the bottom of the front fascia.

From the side, the Carens had all the bells and whistles of a traditional SUV.



Black wheel arches and curbside cladding? Check. Raised triangular window for the third row? Check. Sixteen-inch alloy wheels that lifted the car 195mm off the ground? Check, check, and check. And in case you missed it, the rear bottom also sported a functional red light, plus a spare wheel bolted to the floor pan. Convenient, but be prepared to get dirty in case of a flat.

Prepare yourself for a cabin surprise!

We all know in cars like these that the real magic happens on the inside, and Caren's interior doesn't disappoint. The cabin is awash in a creamy two-tone finish, with seats upholstered in perforated pleather. If you're sitting in one of the rear rows, you'll be pleased to know that you've got your

own air vents on the roof, plus LED cabin lights for all three rows. And for those who like to set the mood, the Carens comes equipped with ambient lighting that offers eight different colours. Safety-wise, the car's got six airbags placed strategically throughout the interior, so you'll feel like you're getting a hug from a friendly octopus if the event of a traffic misfortune.

Like many cars in this category, I expected the front row of the Kia Carens to be lacklustre, but I was pleasantly proven wrong. The driver's seat has a fancy leather-wrapped adjustable multifunction steering wheel and a fully digital 4.2-inch TFT gauge screen. To the right of the wheel is a hidden tray for the key fob or spare change.