

# Kia Carens A Mighty MPV



**K**ia's Carens was always one of those cars that found its natural niche. The cheapest of the mini-MPVs, it was a model that almost sold itself, helped in no small part by the fact that its budget Korean rivals, the Daewoo Tacuma and Hyundai Matrix were, respectively, too ugly and too small to offer much in the way of a challenge. No longer is just a big box with five seats and a few cupholders enough. The latest Carens has a few more tricks in its locker, together with a look and feel that's anything but bargain basement.

Now customers demand sleek styling, punchy powerplants and a whole host of choice when it comes to specifying their vehicle. The side effect of this is that mini-MPVs have become desirable vehicles in their own right rather than the distress purchases of cash-strapped parents.

What's not up for debate is how much larger the current Carens is compared to its already sizeable predecessor. We tend to break the MPV market up into three distinct categories, the supermini MPVs exemplified by cars like the Fiat Idea and the Vauxhall

Meriva, the mini MPV sector that the Carens resides in and full-sized MPVs such as the Volkswagen Sharan, Renault Espace and Chrysler Voyager. This Carens is definitely at the large end of the mini-MPV sector and, from front bumper to rear, is less than 10cm shorter than something in the class above, such as a Sharan

The sleeker look to the Carens helps in the styling department too. The windscreen is raked further back, the front styling features a twin chromed bar grille, a lower centre air intake and a front bumper with inset air intakes or, when specified, fog lamps. You'd be astonished to hear that this was one of the cheapest mini-MPVs you could lay your hands on if you didn't know what it was.

The Carens faces a rejuvenated mini-MPV sector but does so with some serious weapons in its arsenal. In being cheap without appearing cheap, it offers a value alternative to the customer faced with the prospect of buying used. A strong warranty and decent reliability record coupled with a lengthy equipment list will be enough to propel the Carens onto quite a few shortlists. ■

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