KIA GT Coupé

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Powerful, dynamic and forward-looking, Kia’s new concept car signals the company’s distinctive new design direction. This four-door sports sedan with a rear-wheel drive layout – a Kia first – marries sleek and muscular proportions with a sophisticated and elegant four-seater cockpit.

Although work on the Kia GT concept first started in November 2010, the idea of a powerful rear-wheel drive Kia saloon had been percolating in the minds of Kia’s European designers for some time. “This concept allows us to explore exciting new design directions, as using a rear-drive layout creates very different proportions compared to a front-wheel drive car,” says Peter Schreyer, Kia’s Chief Design Officer. ”The classic front-engined, rear-wheel drive layout of a performance saloon has distinct appeal not just for the domestic Korean audience, but also for

the European and American markets."

"At the onset of this project," adds Gregory Guillaume, Kia's European Design Chief, "the design team was inspired by the spirit of iconic 1970s GT cars: sumptuous and elegant vehicles capable of whisking passengers from Paris to the South of France in effortless style and at high speed. We wanted to create something similarly graceful, athletic and confident, but not aggressive or overbearing."

This focus of dynamism and pace is sharpened by the car's aeronautical theme, headlined by the multi-piece propeller-style alloy and carbon-fibre wheels, the jet-themed rear-view cameras, the low-slung front air intake, the aerodynamically efficient rear diffuser and the winglets that curve in from the front flanks and flow into the headlamps.

This particular design motif draws inspiration from the seminal Kia Kee concept car, shown at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 2007. Indeed, Kia GT has a strong design lineage, with a number of central design elements that link it to last year's Pop concept and the Kee, ensuring a high degree of visual continuity despite their divergent styles and themes.

One of Schreyer and Guillaume's key goals was to ensure that the car's proportions couldn't be mistaken for anything other than a rear-wheel drive performance saloon. Hence the extended bonnet with the front wheels pushed right to the very front of the car, the cab-rearward stance, powerful rear shoulders and truncated rear end.

The Kia GT's silhouette accelerates away from the A-pillar towards the rear of the car, and this impression of athleticism is enhanced by the copper signature line that runs from the base of the A-pillar and along the roofline to end ahead of the base of the rear windscreen. And in a neat touch, the tick-shaped motif recalls the front quarter-light windows of the rakish GT cars that inspired the Kia design team.

The inspiration for the use of copper came after a visit by Kia's colour and trim team to the DMY International Design Festival Berlin – Germany's key event for contemporary and conceptual design – where this warm tactile metal was one of the stand-out materials of the show. The material's warmth is balanced by the coolness of the Kia GT's pale grey paintwork, with its mica flakes, that subtly captures nuances of light.

There's a tangible sense of strength and coherence to the Kia GT's flowing lines – from every angle it brims with intent and purpose, a vital element of Schreyer's approach to design. This impression of solidity is further reinforced by the way the roofline extends past the C-pillar to meet the rear screen, hunkering the car closer to the ground.

This powerful confidence is balanced by a raft of eye-catching details. The brake calipers are finished in copper, creating a neat visual link with the car's signature line. The contours of the castellated top of the windscreen flow into the roof, itself subtly bubbled to create further headroom for driver and front passenger. And the bonnet features a discreet power bulge and air intake, hinting at the car's performance potential.

Both Schreyer and Guillaume are particularly passionate about the Kia GT's lights. The alloy-framed central grille is flanked by complex headlamp units that each house a bank of six deeply recessed LED illuminators, to create a highly distinctive nocturnal signature. The advanced construction of the headlamps is mirrored by the single sweeping wing-shaped tail light that flows around the car's flanks and incorporates two sets of three upright stanchions.

The front doors and rear-hinged rear doors open outward at a slight upward angle, imbuing the car with what Schreyer describes as an air of grace and confidence. Despite its low stance, fast roofline and shallow glasshouse, the Kia GT's clean and uncluttered cabin architecture has created a spacious and airy interior with generous accommodation for the driver and three passengers.

The single-piece seats float on arched supports, further accentuating the cabin's spacious

dimensions. The Kia design team deliberately chose to emphasise the proportions of the transmission tunnel to reinforce the power and performance of the saloon, but then balanced this muscularity by moving away from a button-laden centre console and creating a strongly driver-centric layout.

The glass instrument panel – similar to that first seen on last year's Pop concept car – features three layers of organic LEDs. These not only give it a three-dimensional depth but also allow a wealth of information to be displayed at the driver's command, freeing up the centre console from the usual proliferation of controls, buttons and displays. Fingertip controls mounted on the small, dished, three-spoke steering wheel allow the driver to select the desired data display.

This sophisticated instrument panel floats above the muscular centre console, further enhancing the cabin's sense of space. The large red starter button and twist-and-go transmission selector are combined in a single compact unit, further freeing up space on the central transmission tunnel. Playback from the cigar-shaped rear-view cameras is displayed on a pair of compact and thin LED screens mounted on the doors – perfectly positioned in the driver's line of sight.

The warm shades of copper used along the top of the glasshouse create a visual link with the buffed surface of the metallic-treated leather used throughout the cabin, and this russet cabin hue is enriched by the golden tint of the glasshouse.

The idea behind this leather surface treatment is simple – the areas with which the driver and passengers come into regular contact become buffed and smooth, creating a warm and welcoming patina to the cabin.

Schreyer believes this concept is less about design specifics and more about a general feeling of stance, proportion and balance – elements that will influence and guide his design team's approach to their next project.

"One of the great things about working on this project was that this is a very real car," says Schreyer. "It felt good to be working on a car that could roll down the road tomorrow. Yes, it would be a dream to put this into production – it has a logical layout, with four seats, and good luggage space, and it's also engaging and dynamic and makes a strong statement. It's exactly the kind of car Kia should be making."