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Kia Track'ster Pumped Up for The Track

When you take a Kia Soul family car and pump it full of racing steroids and a huge dose of fun you get an awesome result – the Kia Track'ster.

Unveiled at the Chicago Auto Show, the Kia Track'ster concept is a performance-oriented three-door coupe that hints at what could possibly be the future of Kia's internationally successful Soul.

"The idea was to make the Track'ster tough looking, like a bulldog," according to Tom Kearns, chief designer for Kia Motors America. "But the car had to be approachable as well. We wanted to base the car in reality so people instantly knew it was a Soul, but with a lot of attitude. It had to be a bold interpretation that would change people's conceptions of what a sporty Kia could be."

The bold attitude Kearns refers to starts with the eye-catching Whiteout and Inferno Orange racing paint scheme that incorporates Kia's signature grille trimmed in lightweight carbon fibre. Smoothly integrated headlights, featuring recessed lenses and sparkling LEDs, sweep back aggressively over the sculpted front-wheel arches.

Most striking up front is the Track'ster's lower intake grille. Flanked by immense LED driving lights with billet aluminum surrounds, the Track'ster is capable of swallowing prodigious amounts of air to keep the engine running cool under the most grueling conditions. The lower valance, trimmed in carbon fibre and accented with Inferno Orange, rides just millimetres off the ground and lends to the car's menacing stance. The wheelbase has been stretched 25mm.

Custom HRE-K1 mono-block billet performance wheels are wrapped in 245/40-19-inch front and massive 285/35-19-inch rear Michelin Pilot Sport PS2 high-performance tyres. Stopping power is provided by large 14-inch Brembo vented and cross-drilled disc brakes, operated by six-piston calipers in front, while the 13.6-inch discs utilise four-piston calipers at the rear.

The rear doors have disappeared and the front doors are lengthened and adorned with smooth billet, push-style handles and carbon fibre lower side valances, which are also accented in Inferno Orange and incorporate functional rear-brake cooling ducts. The back hatch incorporates a horizontal Inferno Orange 'backpack' panel that accentuates the Track'ster's width, increased by more than 125mm over the production Soul.

With performance a top priority, Track'ster is powered by a 2-litre turbocharged inline-4, developing 186kW (250hp), a 66% increase over the production 2-litre model sold in the US. Power is routed to all four wheels via an electronically-controlled four-wheel-drive system. The short-throw six-speed manual transmission is capped with a stubby spherical shift lever. The Track'ster rides on a lowered sport suspension tuned for track performance.

The interior is highlighted by the Inferno Orange suede-covered racing seats, with Granite Gray leather touches around the cabin, including the steering wheel, red mood lighting and race instruments. The rear seats are replaced by a fully integrated equipment tray to hold the spare tyre. Large paneled bins stow racing gear such as helmets, suits, gloves and tools while emergency supplies are housed within a separate and highly visible Inferno Orange container. A custom rear strut brace incorporates a quick-release handle to allow for fast wheel changes.

"We saw the Track'ster as a performance-inspired concept that could spend time on the road and racetrack," says Kearns. "The idea was to make the tools and equipment necessary to keep the car performing in top condition easily accessible."

While there are no current plans to produce the Track'ster, Kia's California design centre team are keeping fingers crossed that the dream becomes a reality.

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Photo caption: Soul-based Track'ster shows off the fun and sporty side of Kia.

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