**KIA RACING POISED TO DEFEND MANUFACTURER CHAMPIONSHIP AS 2015 PIRELLI WORLD CHALLENGE SEASON OPENS AT CIRCUIT OF THE AMERICAS**

*Kia Racing’s turbocharged Optimas enter the fourth season of the Pirelli World Challenge Grand Touring Sport (GTS) competition as the 2015 season begins in Austin, Texas*

* Mark Wilkins, driver of the No. 38 B.R.A.K.E.S. Optima turbo, returns for his fourth season of Pirelli World Challenge competition
* Newcomer Ben Clucas makes his Pirelli World Challenge debut in the No. 36 DonorsChoose.org Optima turbo

**Irvine, Calif., March 5, 2015** – Following a historic 2014 performance in which Kia became the first Korean automaker to win the Pirelli World Challenge (PWC) Grand Touring Sport (GTS) Manufacturer Championship, earning 13 podiums, including five wins, during the 16-race season, Kia Racing and its partner Kinetic Motorsports start their title defense this weekend at the 2015 season opener at Circuit of the Americas (COTA) in Austin, Texas, March 7-8. The familiar red-and-white Kia sedans sport a striking new livery for 2015, but inside the cockpit, driver Mark Wilkins returns for his fourth season behind the wheel of the No. 38 B.R.A.K.E.S. Optima turbo. Wilkins is joined by British newcomer Ben Clucas, who makes his Kia Racing and PWC debut in the No. 36 DonorsChoose.org Optima turbo in the Lone Star State.

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“2015 marks our fourth season competing in the Pirelli World Challenge. In that time, the series has grown dramatically and so, too, has the level of competition, so the team has their work cut out for them in defending the Manufacturer Championship,” said Michael Sprague, executive vice president of sales and marketing, Kia Motors America (KMA). “But Kia entered motorsports to showcase the quality, reliability and performance of our cars, and we’ve never shied away from a challenge. The team has worked tirelessly over the winter to maximize the Optima platform, and we look forward to an exciting season.”

 The off-season began the moment the Optimas returned to Kinetic’s shop in Buford, Georgia, last September as both cars were stripped down to their bare chassis and then rebuilt. Once the team hit the pavement for on-track testing, the focus turned to suspension and brake tuning to help maximize front-tire efficiency. The Kia Optima is the only front-wheel-drive car in the GTS class, and that presents its own set of challenges to the team and drivers during each grueling 50-minute sprint race. Heading into the opening weekend at COTA, the team is confident they have found a good balance that is both more consistent on tire wear and easier for the driver to manage.

 Kia Racing arrives in Austin for the second time in three years, returning to the scene where Canadian Wilkins earned a podium finish in 2013. The PWC’s previous visit, however, was on COTA’s 2.3-mile, 19-turn short course. 2015 marks the first time the series will run the full 3.4-mile, 20-turn circuit, which features fast sweeping corners, a rhythmic “esses” section and long straightaways, playing to the Optima’s strengths with its long wheelbase, turbocharged power and aerodynamic shape.

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A record-setting entry list of over 100 cars spread across seven classes will be on-hand at COTA, which should make for some great green-flag action during the weekend. Within that total are five Kia entries – two factory-backed GTS Optimas and three Touring Car A (TC-A) privateer Kia Forte Koups. The privateer Forte Koup program has expanded from one full-time entry in 2014 to three full-time entries in 2015. Returning for a second season is defending TC-A Driver Champion and 2014 Rookie of the Year Jason Wolfe in the No. 36 Richard Wolfe Trucking Kia Forte Koup. Wolfe’s impressive rookie performance last season also won Kia the TC-A Manufacturer Championship. Making their PWC debuts at COTA are Kris Wright, in the No. 34 Wright Automotive Kia Forte Koup, and Samantha Tan, in the No. 38 GPI Kia Forte Koup.

The PWC season kicks off at Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas, on March 7-8. In addition to the factory-backed, GTS turbocharged Optimas, all three privateer Forte Koups will be in action as the weekend hosts the first three rounds of the TC-A class. GTS round 1 takes place Saturday, March 7, at 12:20 p.m. CT. Round 2 is Sunday, March 8, at 10:20 a.m. CT. The GTS races will be televised Saturday, March 14, at 11:00 a.m. ET/12:00 p.m. CT on the CBS Sports Network.

TC-A round 1 takes place Saturday, March 7, at 10:30 a.m. CT; round 2 Saturday at 4:15 p.m. CT; and round 3 Sunday, March 8, at 3:10 p.m. CT. Televised TC-A coverage can be seen Wednesday, March 18, at 8:00 p.m. ET, 7:00 p.m. CT on the CBS Sports Network. Live-streamed coverage of all PWC races is available online at www.world-challengetv.com, and race fans can keep up-to-date with the Kia Racing team via the Kia Motors America Facebook page and on Twitter @Kia.

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**About Kia Motors America**

Kia Motors America (KMA) is the marketing and distribution arm of Kia Motors Corporation based in Seoul, South Korea, and in 2014 was the #1 ranked mainstream brand according to Strategic Vision’s Total Quality Index. KMA proudly serves as the "Official Automotive Partner" of the NBA and LPGA and set an all-time annual sales record in 2014, surpassing the 500,000 unit mark for the third consecutive year. KMA offers a complete line of vehicles, including the rear-drive K900[[1]](#endnote-1) flagship sedan, Cadenza premium sedan, Sorento CUV, Soul urban passenger vehicle, Soul Electric Vehicle2, Sportage compact CUV, Optima midsize sedan, Optima Hybrid, the Forte compact sedan, Forte5 and Forte Koup, Rio and Rio 5-door subcompacts and the Sedona midsize multi-purpose vehicle, through a network of more than 765 dealers across the United States. Kia’s U.S. manufacturing plant in West Point, Georgia, builds the Optima\* and Sorento\* and is responsible for the creation of more than 14,000 plant and supplier jobs.

Information about KMA and its full vehicle line-up is available at www.kia.com. For media information, including photography, visit www.kiamedia.com. To receive custom email notifications for press releases the moment they are published, subscribe at www.kiamedia.com/us/en/newsalert.

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**\* The Sorento and Optima GDI (EX, SX & Limited and certain LX Trims only) are assembled in the United States from U.S. and globally sourced parts**

1. 2015 K900 V8 available in select trims and in select markets with limited availability.

2 2015 Soul EV in select markets with limited availability.

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