



# Ford Focus

Featuring 1.6 Zetec 3-door automatic



## What's different?

**Britain's 1999 best-selling 'European Car of the Year' is now even easier to drive, with an 'Electronic Shift Control' (ESC) automatic added to the line-up. Mated to the 1.6-litre Zetec engine and available across all body styles, the four-speed auto is a keenly priced option.**

**F**ORD'S "NEW EDGE"-STYLED FOCUS MAY not be the apple of everyone's eye as far as its styling goes, but, looks apart, there's precious little paucity of appeal in the way it drives. It's easy to forget that the funky Focus has been with us for only just over a year, but already the popular Escort replacement is an everyday sight and has firmly re-occupied top slot in the UK sales charts.

It's all well and good introducing a winner, but to stay at the head of the pack, month in, month out – especially in the all-important fleet sector – a car needs to have strength and depth throughout its make-up. The Focus already has plenty of that. But on its first anniversary, Ford has set about filling in a few gaps. So, to the saloons,

hatches and estates already available (powered by 1.6-, 1.8- and two-litre Zetec engines, as well as the refettled and significantly less raucous turbo-diesel), Ford has now added a racy two-litre Zetec, complete with dynamic stability control. Four-speed automatic transmission (as tested here) is also now available. No manufacturer can afford to be without one in its line-up.

Available only with the 100bhp, 1.6-litre 16-valve Zetec engine (so far, at least), the four-speeder is a conventional automatic, with a switchable overdrive top gear ratio and torque converter lock-up. Electronic, so-called "fuzzy logic", control masterminds seven different transmission inputs, connecting them to no less than eleven separate engine functions. The main benefit of this form of electronic jiggery-pokery is that it constantly adapts shift patterns to the operating conditions and one's style of driving, so doing away with the need for driver-selectable sport or economy modes.

So how does it perform? Well, we reckon that the Focus is one of the sweetest, most endearing automatics of any shape, size or price tag that we've encountered in a long time. Our only niggles concerned our test car's hint of a whine after a cold start and just a touch of abruptness in the first few shifts of day – thereafter, the changes are almost imperceptibly smooth.

*Continued on page 3*

## PERFORMANCE

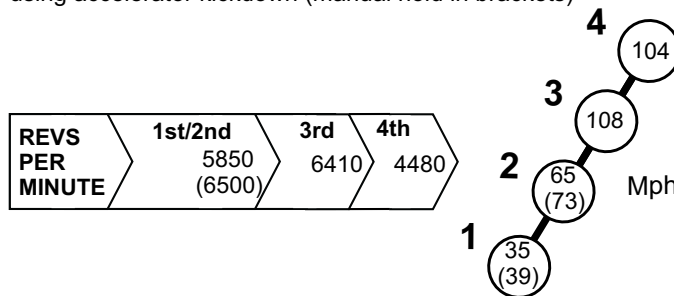
**Acceleration** time in seconds  
using accelerator kickdown  
manual hold (to 6500rpm) in brackets

mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>THROUGH THE GEARS</b>					
		2.0 (1.9)	4.9 (4.7)	8.0 (7.9)	12.9 (11.9)

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
<b>SPEED RANGES USING KICKDOWN</b>					
		3.6 (3.5)		6.1 (6.0)	
			4.9 (4.7)		8.0 (7.2)

## Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown (manual hold in brackets)



## FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded 95 octane petrol	
<b>Type of use - air conditioning off*</b>	<b>mpg</b>
In the city - heavy traffic	20
In the country - quiet driving	39
<b>Typical mpg overall</b>	<b>31</b>
Realistic tank range†	49 litres/330 miles

†based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience - not nominal tank capacity

\*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

## FOR THE TECHNICAL

### ENGINE

**Type** front-mounted, transverse four cylinder with alloy block and head; five main bearings  
**Size** 79.0 x 81.4mm = 1596cc  
**Power** 100bhp at 6000rpm  
**Torque** 105 lb ft at 4000rpm  
**Valves** twin belt-driven overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via bucket tappets  
**Fuel-ignition** electronically controlled multi-point petrol injection integrated with programmed distributorless ignition. Three-way exhaust catalyser and 55-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

### TRANSMISSION

**Type** four-speed automatic; front-wheel drive. Auto option available with 100bhp 1.6 Zetec engine (Zetec, LX and Ghia trim) in all body styles  
**Mph per 1000rpm** 23.2 in 5th, 16.8 in 4th  
**Rpm at 70mph** 3015

### CHASSIS

**Suspension** front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs and lower arms  
Rear: multi-link independent system with coil springs. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars all round

**Steering** rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.6m between full locks, with 15.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

**Wheels** 6in alloy (x4) with 195/60 R15H tyres (Pirelli P6000 on test car); (5½ x 14" steel with 185/65 R14H tyres on LX and Ghia); space saver spare

**Brakes** ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo and optional electronic anti-lock control. (ABS combined with traction control and side airbags in Reflex Pack)

## SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

### Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

### Door locking

central locking?

remote control?

### Head restraints

front ●●○○○ rear ●●●○○

auto window closure?

deadlocks?

### Interior

safety padding ●●●○○

driver's airbag?

other airbags? of Reflex option (1)

side impact protection ●●●○○

### Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

### Alarm

engine immobilised?

### Fuel anti-spillage

●●●○○

standard on test car  factory fitted option  not available

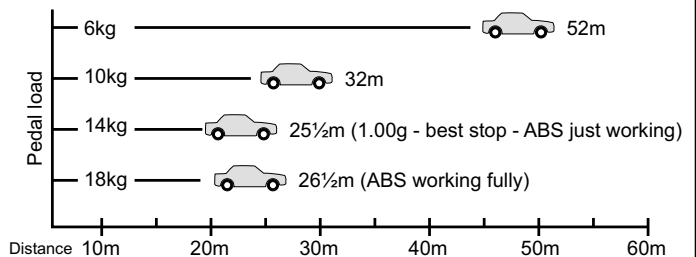
**Euro NCAP crash test results-** Not available

## BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○ Handbrake ●●●●●

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)

A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load



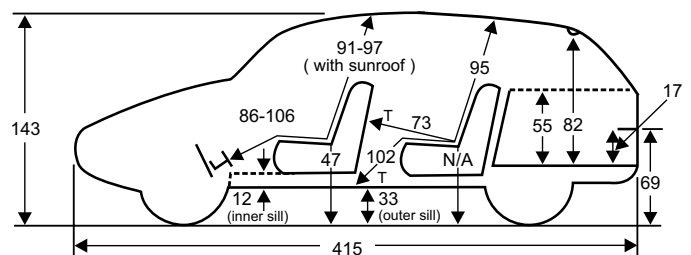
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

8kg at start of test, 9kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

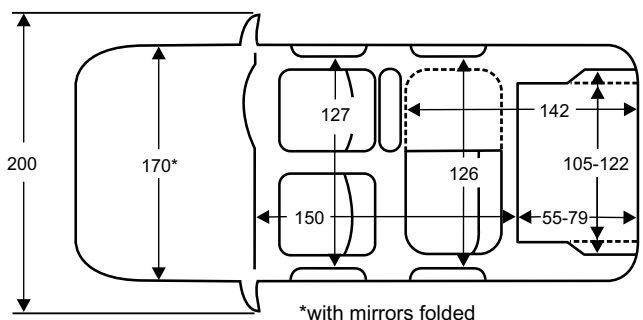
## MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

3-door hatchback (Zetec)



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



The ESC's chunky, nicely shaped shift lever is handily placed and works with a slick, positive action, while both the detent override and top gear lock-out buttons prove equally untaxing to locate and use. Full marks, for the bold gear-position markings on the lever surround, clearly illuminated at night, too. And more Brownie points, because they're positioned on the correct side of the stick to always afford the driver a clear, unobstructed view of them – not always the case.

The smooth, willing Zetec engine and auto gearbox are accomplished performers in their own right, yet the pair together add up to more than the sum of their parts. The transmission's part-throttle responsiveness, and its ability to always pick the right gear for the right occasion while not hanging on to each ratio for too long, make for extremely unobtrusive operation. And, while it could be argued that this – indeed *any* – automatic might be more appropriately combined with the less overtly sporting LX or Ghia versions, this one complements rather than clashes with the Zetec's sportily slanted character.

It's also one of those automatics that's best left to its own devices. Performance is fractionally quicker by manually delaying shifts until 6500rpm, rather than relying on the transmission's self-imposed 5850rpm change-up point, but unless you take perverse delight in inflicting jerky discomfort on your passengers, the 'box usually knows best.

Against a manual 1.6 we tested earlier, the automatic drops a couple of seconds in the benchmark 30-70mph sprint, and is a handful of mph down on top speed. Things look less rosy in the economy stakes, though, with the torque converter's inherent inefficiency pegging fuel consumption from the commendable 40mpg or so we obtained with the manual, to the rather less respectable 31mpg we netted this time. This penalty, to be fair, applies to all torque-converter automatics, and a saving grace is that the Focus responds favourably to a gentle touch – game for cracking the 40mpg barrier on a gentle jaunt, barely even breaking into a sweat.

Available in all trim levels and across all four of the Focus's body styles (but not all permutations thereof), the price of admission to a two-pedal Focus currently starts from a keenly respectable £13,500. For this, you'll have to be content with only one door on each side, and discover the dynamic delights the Focus has to offer in its sportier, more stiffly sprung Zetec form. Neither of these constitutes a major hardship, however.

In other respects, there's little we can usefully add to the comment: "Reassuring, yet loads of fun" that we made about the Focus in our earlier report (see R9919), featuring a 1.6LX and 1.8-litre-powered Zetec. You may be unimpressed by the styling and the restricted over-the-shoulder vision that results, but don't dismiss the three-door Focus too lightly. Far from being a penny-pinching passage to entry-level status, the three-door hatch provides much the same roomy accommodation and creature comforts as the five-door offers, catering for those who prefer not to pay for doors they don't actually need.

Admittedly, the longer doors are tiresome in confined parking areas and, of course, *somebody* in the front always has to get wet to let back seat passengers in or out. This apart, though, big doors, front seats that move well out of the way, and seatback release catches positioned just where you want them – right on the outermost, top corner – make getting in and out as easy as it can be. And once there, passengers enjoy a roomy, supportive seat and agreeable surroundings.

## VERDICT

**Today's ever more traffic-blighted highways and byways make letting an automatic take some of the strain out of twenty-first century motoring look an increasingly appealing proposition.**

**Of course, the Focus's "straight" automatic can't compete with the sort of ingenious 'two-for-the-price-of-one', automatic that behaves like a manual (or vice versa) that we're beginning to see. Neither, it must be said, does it manage to preserve most of the economy of a manual in the way that continuously variable transmission does.**

**Sidestep these obstacles, however, and the automatic Focus makes a heartily convincing case for those who prefer, or need, the gearchanging done for them.**

**Automatics can give the feeling (to keener drivers, at least) that something has been taken away. In this case, though, ease of use and extra versatility have been added to the Focus's many and varied charms, further increasing its all-round appeal. Whether to go for the racier Zetec or, instead, a more conservative LX or Ghia model, seems to depend largely on which side of the thirtysomething age barrier you're looking from.**

<b>HOW THE FOCUS AUTO COMPARES</b>	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
<b>FORD FOCUS 1.6 3DR AUTO</b>	<b>1596/100</b>	<b>3015</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>25½/14*</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>102/73</b>	<b>2.9/10.6</b>	<b>415</b>
<b>Citroën Xsara 1.6 SX 5dr auto</b>	1587/90	3300	13.4	NA	36½	25/23*	107	99/74	3.2/10.7	417
<b>Chrysler Neon 2.0 LX 4dr auto</b>	1996/131	3100	10.6	NA	31	29/14	109	97/76	2.8/10.9	439
<b>Mercedes Benz A140 5dr auto clutch</b>	1397/82	3025	13.3	36.4/23.3	37	25/25*	110	97/71	3.7/10.7	358
<b>Rover 216 5dr auto §</b>	1589/111	2800	10.3	NA	34½	28/16*	107	94/65	3.4/10.4	397
<b>Suzuki Baleno 1.6GLX Estate 5dr auto</b>	1590/98	3020	13.4	NA	37	27/24	108	100/70	3.3/9.7	435
<b>Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v 5dr manual</b>	1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
<b>VW Golf 1.6 5dr manual</b>	1595/100	3540	10.8	23.3/17.3	35	27½/18*	111	95/71	3.1/10.4	415
<b>VW New Beetle 2.0 3dr manual</b>	1984/115	3460	10.4	20.7/15.1	35	24/22*	113	93/71	3.1/10.4	408
§ - tested as Rover 216; revised model now called Rover 25						* with ABS		(p) all power-assisted		