



Ford Mondeo

Featured models: 2-litre (diesel and petrol) LX 5 door



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

LIKES AND GRIPES

lidded spectacles holder in roof
roof lamps front and rear
key-locked bonnet with gas struts
damped grab handles over doors
push-button heater controls

miniscule tell-tales for heater
front centre armrest gets in the way
one-piece rear cushion hard to fold
door pull-armrests awkward
no cassette option for audio system

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (<i>inc mirrors</i>)	473x193
front - legroom	93-110
- headroom (<i>no sunroof</i>)	96-103
rear - typical legroom	104
- typical kneeroom	81
- headroom	90
- hiproom	133
load space (<i>all seats in use</i>) (litres/cu ft)	595/21
load length (seats up/folded)	103/166
load width	95-143
load sill height (<i>inside/outside</i>)	20/71
boot/load aperture height	48/78

THE MONDEO RANGE

body upper medium 5 door hatch, 4 door saloon, estate
trim levels LX, Zetec, Zetec S, Ghia, Ghia X
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.8 litre/125bhp; 4/2.0/145; V6/2.5/170 diesel: 4/2.0/115
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4 speed auto with torque converter on 2.0 petrol only)
notable features "intelligent" progressive safety features deployment - six airbags, five x 3-point belts, fuel cut-off.
Standard ABS with disc brakes all round; 16in wheels; new engines and chain-driven camshafts; air-con standard; 12-year anti-rust and 3-year mechanical warranty

NOVELTY BY ITSELF WON'T sell cars, but it helps. The previous Mondeo deserved its success, but when the phrase "Mondeo-man" is coined by sociologists and politicians, it must mean there's little novelty-value left in being seen in one. So here's its replacement, with the same triple body configurations, but 18cm (7in) longer.

The big improvements are in the technical detail – there's a new family of engines and a lot of safety and security features as standard, including ABS and a bevy of airbags.

This new version's extra size may be in response to the demise of Granada/Scorpio; it's certainly produced even more generous rear passengers' space and luggage capacity. The way the back seat folds makes heavy weather of the operation, however.

Up front, there's a generous range of adjusters to ensure comfort in control for everyone, although our two test cars' optional automatic climate control didn't perform at all consistently on "auto". We like the clear white-on-black instruments, but over-the-shoulder vision isn't easy and the (electric) door mirrors are smaller, although they now fold easily.

However, Mondeo's "surprise and delight" attributes are less feature-based and more to do with its dynamic qualities. Less surprising, of course, is that it rides, and especially corners and steers, in masterful fashion. Any successor to the first-generation Mondeo would be expected to. It's slightly firm over poor

roads, but seldom harsh and never directionally uncertain; if anything, steering and grip are even better than before.

Owners of the current (especially pre-1998) two-litre will be impressed. Low-speed flexibility and smoothness are now exemplary; the increased 15bhp endows the heavier car with good full-bore response, but the sound it makes is hardly mellifluous and there's an unwelcome exhaust resonance that intrudes just before the legal limit.

No, if you want a trendsetter in acoustic sobriety, go for the remarkable new diesel. At 70mph, if you slip the lever into neutral, you can't hear any difference! When starting and accelerating, you still know it's a diesel, but the "death rattle" harshness one expects of a direct-injection four cylinder is muted to a softer, lighter tone. With a 25bhp power boost, an "official" mpg figure that's also 3mpg better, and the promise of 12,500-mile service intervals (with no oil consumption in between) this engine is a *tour de force*.

VERDICT

We're becoming accustomed to new Fords with technical merit as well as showroom appeal. This Mondeo - especially the diesel - is so good that it ought to give the Mercedes C-Class and BMW 3-Series a run for their money; it will certainly cost less both to buy and to run. The only impediment is that, within the year, you'll see so many of them.