

Ford Fiesta 1.4 Ghia CTX Automatic



IT'S STILL FORD'S new baby, but this is the one with the silver spoon – it costs £2750 more than the 1.1L we featured in our previous report, R8919.

The bigger engine is borrowed from the Escort and offers 20bhp more – it's an entirely different design, but doesn't make use of the 1.1 version's 'lean burn' technology.

More intriguing is the CTX 'stepless' automatic transmission that Ford has pioneered with the Dutch Van Doorne concern. This box of tricks is much more sophisticated than the Volvo 340's, and only the Fiat Uno Selecta shares it at present, although Subaru offers something similar in its Justy 4WD minicar. Initially confined to 1.1 litre/60bhp versions, Ford and Fiat now feel confident about linking CTX to their more powerful engines, even to the 1.6 CVH in the Escort.

Ghia trim is the poshest you can get and adds about £1320 to the asking price of an LX, whereas the five-door option costs just under £300 more at present. Whether you look at the sum total or these individual items, there's no eluding the fact that the new Fiesta's prices are pitched high. Is it sufficiently superior to justify buying one with all or most of the options?

AT THE WHEEL

– driver appeal?

The 1.4 CVH is not our favourite Ford engine – it gives inferior economy to the 90bhp 1.6 litre and tends to growl harshly above 4000rpm. Still, there's no denying its livelier turn of speed and, when warmed to the CTX auto-box, one never experiences the harshness at any vaguely legal cruising speed – only when accelerating. So, with these taken as a pair, we were enthusiastic about our car's general peppy response to the accelerator, but felt that on the face of it, 36mpg overall was a disappointment.

Ford has the answer in the form of the 1.3 HCS engine – at present offered only in the basic Escort and Orion. This is the power unit that could endow the Fiesta with both the performance and fuel economy it should deliver, with or without the CTX option. At present, it's a case of 'slow but miserly' or 'nippy but thirsty', in 1.1 and 1.4 guises respectively.

Let's take a closer look at the gearbox. The versatility of this transmission system is that it behaves as if it were a six-speed gearbox in its ratio spread, yet does it all without any gear-changing at all, in the accepted sense.

UNLEADED FUEL FACTS

The 1.4 CVH Fiesta currently accepts unleaded petrol, but if 95 octane is to be used, the ignition should be retarded 4 degrees – to 8 degrees BTDC initial advance. Although our performance and economy figures were obtained without doing this, we temporarily retarded the ignition and recorded only a slight loss of performance. 30-70mph through the gears took $\frac{1}{2}$ second longer and mpg at 70mph suffered by less than 1mpg.

Because both driving and driven pulleys have the power to alter their diameters progressively, the Fiesta's engine spends most of the time revving between 3000 and 4500rpm in one steady surge of acceleration from rest to one's targetted cruising speed.

As soon as that speed is reached, the revs fall away almost by magic to settle at a canter that puts most executive cars' fifth gears to shame. In fact, 70mph cruising on the level runs the engine at about 3000rpm, with a self-imposed top limit of 5200rpm on full throttle.

All this can be done in D – 'kickdown', in fact, occurs at about two-thirds throttle depression, to activate the control hydraulics that seek engine speeds that will give best performance.

This 'ready to go' circuit can also be engaged in anticipation by selecting the L position on the precise centre quadrant. This setting also gives useful engine braking on the overrun and hill descents, holding the revs at a steady 3500rpm after selecting this mode, without so much as a nod of your passenger's head.

Reverse and park are protected by a detent in the lever movement, but less pleasing are the quadrant markings being on the wrong side of the lever for UK use. Also, the car remains so untroubled in L that we wonder if some drivers might leave it there all day, because there's no facia warning light to remind them.

We read a report somewhere that said, 'Of course, the CTX Fiesta doesn't accelerate as smartly as a five-speed manual. . .' Actually, this just ain't true – indeed, away from the lights, its continuous surge of uninterrupted force leaves most other drivers groping with their gears. The absence of a rising (and falling) engine note can make you *feel* as though it's not pulling as strongly, but the stopwatch proves otherwise. In fact, both our 30-70mph acceleration time and our fuel consumptions proved remarkably close to those of a five-speed Escort 1.4 we tested earlier (see R8612). As such, it's the only automatic option on any small car that doesn't significantly dent both performance and economy (except for the Uno Selecta, presumably).

Snags? Well, it has a much smoother accelerator action than previously, but there's still a hint of jerkiness of response, just as the car begins to move – or comes to rest. There's also an associated slight delay as you press the accelerator to move off from rest, which can be disconcerting in parking manoeuvres. 'Two-footing' (gently holding the car on the brake as one, equally gently, squeezes the accelerator) eliminates the difficulties.

With extra weight over the front axle, we thought this 1.4's ride and handling compromise was the best of any of the current Fiestas'. The opportunity to drive them all in the last few months has left us feeling like Goldilocks. The ordinary 1.1 is really too soft and vague for keener drivers, whereas the 1.6S and XR2 feel too hard and macho. No, with just two aboard, this 1.4 feels just right in bump, doesn't roll too much on corners and only the feel-less, low-gear steering remains a disappointment in the handling department. It's easy-going when parking, however. With a full load, the Fiesta doesn't feel quite as smooth, developing a tendency to heave and toss on poorer roads. At such times, the absence of easy headlamp beam trimmers becomes embarrassing, too.

COMFORT AND CONTROL

– all the trimmings?

The advent of the five-door Fiesta will certainly prove popular with the elderly and less agile. There's reasonable foot entry and the longer wheelbase pushes the wheelarches back out of the way, so it's a friendly, obliging small car in this respect. Actually, it's not significantly roomier in the back seat, but the luggage space does offer small but important extra inches, this way and that, compared with the older model.

In many ways, the Ghia cachet has been debased over the years – not least because LX versions are nowadays more generously endowed. Nevertheless, we had hoped the Ghia would have had a soft-feel facia with anti-skid oddments surfaces, a roof lamp at the rear of the cabin (as well as rear courtesy switches) and an intermittent sweep for the tailgate wiper; sadly, it possesses none of these. The infuriating door mirror adjusters ought to be eliminated by electrification, and although there's central locking in this Ghia, it doesn't include the fuel filler and there's no low-level tell-tale either.

Ghia instruments do include a tachometer (200rpm under-reading on our car), but there's no rheostat control or items such as door-ajar warning. We were disappointed to note that the lumbar support on our driver's seat was

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 4.4	0-60mph 12.8	1/4 mile 19.5
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH GEARS	2.1	4.9	8.4	13.0	

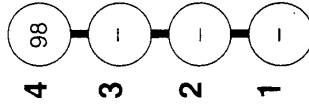
20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
SPEED* RANGES	4.2	6.2	5.0	8.3	

* using kickdown and low

Maximum speeds

using accelerator kickdown

MAX REVS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
	5280	-	-	-



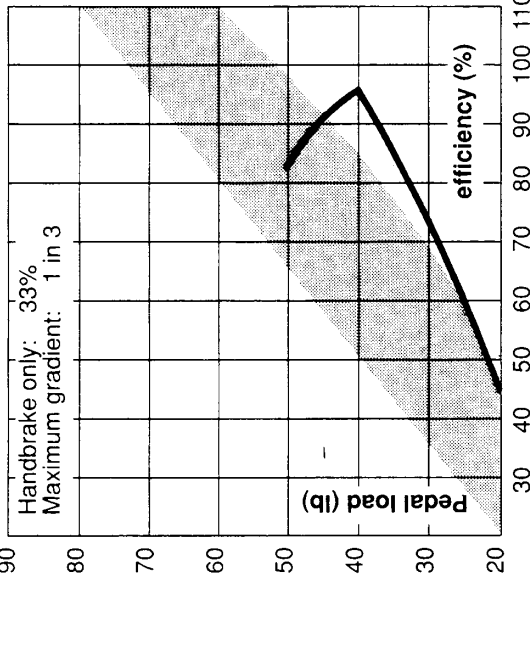
FUEL CONSUMPTION

Grade for tests:	98 octane (Super) unleaded
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	26
Short journeys in the suburbs	30
Motorway – 70mph cruising	37
Brisk driving, mixed roads	37
Gentle driving – rural roads	42
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range*	35 litres/275 miles
*based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience	

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



Efficiency expressed as a % of gravity. Ideal braking performance falls within shaded zone – above, too heavy; below, too light

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

32	At start of test
37	After constant use
38	After severe use
32	After watersplash
0	Number of stops to recover

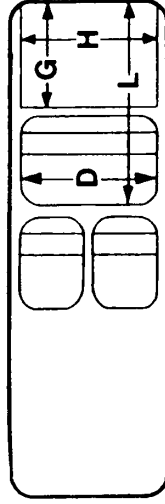
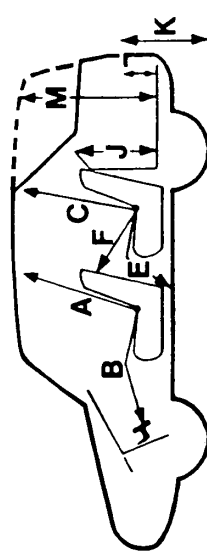
Check list

Steering	true 'feel' of road?	☒
Brakes	powerful? sensible effort? fade resistant?	☒ ☒ ☒
Belts	front – effective? convenient? rears – effective? convenient?	☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
Head restraints	front – effective? rear – effective?	☒ ☒
Interior	thoroughly padded?	☒
Fuel	shielded filler? protected tank?	☒ ☒

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Outside (ft and in)

Kerb weight	17½ cwt	Overall length	12ft 3½ in
Overall width	6ft 1 in*	Overall height	4ft 4¼ in
Wheelbase	8ft 0¼ in	*mirrors don't fold	



Inside (inches)

A Front headroom	36¼	G Load length	25
B Front legroom (min - max)	34-41	H Load floor width (min - max)	35-52
C Rear headroom	35	J Load height	19
D Rear seat width (between armrests)	47¼	K Sill height (inner/outer)	6¼/26
E Typical rear legroom*	37½	L Load length	49
F Typical rear kneeroom*	27½	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	32

Typical represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

noticeably sagging after 9000 miles use – the passenger's seat proved much better. Surely, manual lumbar adjusters should be provided on a Ghia, in any case.

Our car had a heated windscreen – a £125 option, even on the Ghia. It proves remarkably effective on a frosty morning – the wipers clear the view within half a minute. However, you must have the engine running before it will work, which means fuel wastefulness in the critical cold-start part of the day. Our 'suburban use' consumption would have been 2mpg heavier if we had waited at idle for the thing to do its stuff.

Having bleated about what we missed on the Ghia, let us add that the interior fabric is of impressive quality, with convenient pull-armrests on the fully trimmed doors. The boot is well trimmed, too, and there's a useful tailgate release on the lower fascia, between the oddly positioned front window switches.

LIVING WITH THE FIESTA CTX

– how reassuring?

The CVH unit fills the Fiesta's engine bay with less room to spare and some topping-up items are more obscure, even though they are marked in yellow for identification purposes. The contents of the screenwasher container is not visible, but the wheel-changing tools are clearly sited.

Unlike our 1.1L test car, this one was not fitted with the anti-lock braking option. In fact, its emergency stop was better without SCS, but the stronger servo assistance makes attaining this ultimate braking, without a skid, a more delicate art than used to be true of the Mark I Fiesta, which had ideal pedal progression and responses.

Inside the Ghia, the front seatbelts have instantly adjustable shoulder mounts, but the centre clasps still wobble about on floor-mounted bits of wire. Outside, there's extra side-flank protection (from carelessly opened doors), but in spite of appearances, the lower bumper valances are not plastic, they're just painted.

VERDICT

Just as we finished testing this Ghia, Ford decided to do something about Fiesta's value for money by offering the better-equipped LX at the discontinued L's lower prices. This means that the 1.4 Automatic is available in LX guise for a price that substantially undercuts this Ghia. It eases the strain on your wallet by over £1300, with nothing significant missing from the inventory of standard equipment.

It's obviously the version to opt for if you want a small automatic, and the 1.4's lively turn of speed is worth having over the lethargic 1.1 version. However, bigger doesn't mean quieter and this engine's fuel consumption is disappointing, too – preventing the excellent transmission from demonstrating its economy advantage over its rivals.

Still, if you overlook the costs, this small Ford automatic has so much going for it. Even seasoned testers begin to think that they might prefer it to the five-speed manual. For those whose driving licence, physical aptitude or disinterested preference demand it, this is the small automatic of the future.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 77.2mm bore x 74.3mm stroke = 1392cc. Iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.5:1

Valve gear overhead camshaft (driven by toothed belt) actuating 2 valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system one Weber twin-throat carburettor (manual choke) fed by mechanical pump from 42 litre (9¼ gallon) tank (no low-level warning lamp). Fuel required: leaded or unleaded – 97 octane minimum with standard ignition setting. See 'Unleaded fuel facts' panel

Ignition system coil and breakerless distributor, with mechanical advance

Maximum power (DIN-net) 75bhp at 5600rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 80 lb ft at 4000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type continuously-variable by steel element pusher-belt and pulleys. Two multi-plate (forward and reverse) clutches for start-up. Ratio range overall within gearbox: low 3.48:1, high 0.63:1, reverse 3.86:1

Final drive 3.84:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm ranges from 4.73 to 26.13 (theoretical)

Rpm at 70mph 3050 (observed) when cruising on level road

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and L-shaped lower links. Rear: torsion beam dead axle with trailing arms and coil springs. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering unassisted rack and pinion with 4¼ turns between full locks. Turning circles average 33ft between kerbs, with 64½ft for one turn of wheel

Wheels 4½in steel with 155/70 R13S radials (Michelin MXL on test car)

Brakes 9½in plain discs front, 7in drums rear with vacuum servo

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneerom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (ft/in)
Ford Fiesta 1.4CTX Ghia (5 door)	1392/75	98	13.0	36	97/40	41	37½/27½	4¼/33	12' 3½"
Metro 1.3 Automatic (5 door)	1275/62	89	17.7	32½	98/50	38½	37¾/25¼	3¼/33	11' 2"
Honda Civic 1.3DX (manual)	1343/75	105	11.2	42½	98/45	43	36¾/26¾	3¾/32½	13' 0¼"
Peugeot 205 1.4GT (manual)	1360/85	106	10.2	39	94/55	40¼	37/27¼	3¾/33¼	12' 1¾"
Ford Escort 1.4 Ghia (manual)	1392/75	103	13.1	37	93/50	40½	39/28½	3½/36	13' 2½"