

FIRST
DRIVE

Ford Fiesta

Featured model: 5-door hatchback



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

THE FIESTA RANGE

size and type supermini (mid-priced); 3- and 5-door; other derivatives later

trim levels not yet announced

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.3 litre/68bhp, 4/1.4/80, 4/1.6/100; diesel: 4/1.4/68

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (no automatic yet)

notable features electronic throttle control on all engines, diesel weighs little more than petrol versions – uses latest common rail injection, hydraulic clutch operation

FORD'S NEW SMALL CAR IS STILL called Fiesta, but it goes off in a different direction from the old one. At least, this is true of the five-door hatch, which is the first of the new range to hit the market.

Like the competition, Ford's super-mini has grown (in length, width and height), so it comes as no surprise to discover that most interior dimensions are improved by 3-5cm, as well. The car is easier to enter and leave (especially in the rear), but there are still door and cargo-deck load sills to negotiate; the latter is the only one to be plastic-protected.

Nevertheless, the Fiesta is now a reasonable proposition for days out with the family – so long as nobody is too lanky; when alone, however, the tall driver comes off well. But so, too, does the really short, thanks to wheel plus seat-cushion height adjusters and clever contouring of the lower fascia; these make the full-forward seat position entirely useable. With the front seat cushion higher than before, as well, you do feel the benefits of a good, natural driving position and the long gear lever is conveniently to hand; it also moves with superb precision.

In fact, the cabin irritations are of only a minor nature (see our "Likes and Gripes" panel), but it's a shame they're there at all. The biggest irritation is in the rear, however – the backrest is 60/40 split, but not the cushion, so a flat, L-shaped floor can't be attained. There's no trim (just painted metal) on these rear backrests;

when tilted forwards, they're slippery and will become scratched.

Two engines were available on our appraisal: the detuned 1.4 petrol (down from 90 to 80bhp) and an interesting new diesel from collaborator, Peugeot/Citroën.

Both are well subdued acoustically, but, despite its power advantage on paper, the petrol version feels strangled in its accelerator response, with some attendant unevenness. The diesel delights by handling low revs (below 1500rpm) without a vestige of vibration or harshness and it feels just as game to 4000 revs, whereupon it runs out of breath.

This new Fiesta rides the bumps competently, but when it comes to a series of inviting, open bends, the old version almost spoke the words "Try me!", whereas the new one responds with "Must we?" Still tidy, but less encouraging.

VERDICT

This is just the start of the new Fiesta range, and is clearly destined to be the everyday, no-risks version for users who use, rather than revere, their everyday transport. As such it should fit their needs – and their pockets – admirably. But for more discerning drivers who don't need the extra space, the older version arguably, still offers the better drive. And for a while, this choice will be available.

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (folded mirrors)	392x169
front – legroom	83-108
– headroom (no sunroof)	94-99
rear – typical legroom	96
– typical kneeroom	73
– headroom	92
– hiproom	125
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	340/12.0
load length (seats up/folded)	56/125
load width	100-128
load sill height (inside/outside)	18/65
boot/load aperture height	57/84

LIKES ...

sun visors cover glass well
rear head restraints fold down flush
both screens have heating/pause wipe
takeaway ashtray-cum-oddments holder
gear lever location and action

and GRIPES

indistinct minor displays
no roof grab handles/door grips awkward
hard plastic fascia finish
no scuff strips on bumpers/sills
no heater stratification = stuffiness