

Ford Fiesta XR2i



WHEN THE NEW FIESTA RANGE went on sale in April 1989, Ford held back the image-boosting XR2i version, leaving fans of the old XR2 to sit on their wallets until autumn.

Whatever the reasons for the delay (there was talk at the time of driveline 'bugs' and concern over poor engine refinement), the 'Junior League' hot-hatch for the masses duly arrived, to be followed soon after by the even racier Fiesta RS Turbo.

Bespoilered and skirted, with quad rectangular lamps set into the front spoiler, and – just to be different – prominent blue bumper and side moulding inserts, the XR2i doesn't intend to be missed. The tearaway Turbo shares the same extrovert body trappings, but is identified by green inserts and distinctive three-spoke alloy wheels.

Despite limited performance, a bone-hard ride

and a mediocre chassis, the old XR2 was always a good seller, accounting for about 20 per cent of total Fiesta sales – in the UK, at least; European buyers were considerably thinner on the ground.

Even so, the keener Fiesta driver is now much better catered for, with three sporty models to choose from. Better looking and roomier, they are available with three different power outputs: 90bhp in the 1.6S, 110bhp in this XR2i and 133bhp in the RS Turbo.

At the wheel

Performance is, of course, a prerequisite in this pocket-rocket class, and with a near two-miles-a-minute top speed and 0 to 60mph dashed off in under 9sec, the XR2i certainly delivers the goods at the test track. But,

while there's little wrong with its outright performance, in many other respects the XR2i fails to win the heart of the keener driver.

Dynamically, it lacks the magic ingredient – fun with finesse, if you like – that marks out a superior hot-hatch. The sportily firm ride, for instance, while quite acceptable in this class, does handling precision and straight-line stability few favours. This makes inch-perfect placement an unattainable goal as mid-bend bumps, cambers and ridges all tend to undermine a smooth, flowing style at the wheel.

Then there's the steering. While the attempt to keep steering efforts manageable for all drivers is laudable, the arm-twirling, low-feedback helm is at odds with the feel of the chunky two-spoke wheel. It's still heavy at times, too. It feels best suited to 'shopping trolley' versions of the Fiesta rather than this sporty one. And, while torque steer is reasonably well curbed, applying a good dose of throttle and lock together still calls for a firm grip on the wheel.

Underbonnet, the XR2i's injected 'compound valve hemi' power unit is a mixed bag. Although still plagued by the old CVH problem of boom and thrashiness in the upper reaches, it's nevertheless impressive for the liveliness lower down, only partially hinted at by its 2800rpm torque peak.

Kept below 3500 to 4000 revs, it's a civilised performer and still pretty brisk, but the acoustic assault increases markedly beyond this point, rendering the 6500rpm red-line, and the rev limiter just beyond, largely irrelevant for all but the insensitive. Mind you, judging engine speeds can be a hit-or-miss affair: our test car's rev counter was spot-on at some points, yet nearly 500rpm adrift at others!

While fuel economy is somewhat less important in this class than others, electronic fuel injection helps the Fiesta to maintain a reasonably well-controlled thirst: the XR2i averaged 37½mpg overall in our hands. However, the Nova GTE (recently retagged as the GSi) offers similar performance, but manages 41mpg overall.

Compared with the previous model, the Fiesta's lockable fuel filler is mounted higher on the rear wing, so making life far easier at the fuel pumps. A low-fuel warning lamp is notable only by its absence, however – a rather unusual omission these days.

Inside story

Inside, the Fiesta has a carefully planned driving position, good all-round vision and well-placed controls. The clutch is commendably light and the driveline smooth and well-cushioned, but the

gearchange loses marks for a degree of whippy imprecision.

The blue-line decor can't be missed on the inside – boldly across each door and even more prominently as a thick carpet-line between the seat and the door aperture. Naturally, the numbers on the gearlever knob are in 'XR2i blue', too. Distinctive it may be, subtle it's not.

The XR2i uses the same seats that were pioneered on the new Fiesta (and used in the new Escort, too), where the fabric covering and foam cushions are moulded in one. Go-faster Fiestas boast 'sports' front seats with more pronounced side bolsters, although these tend to look more effective than they really are at keeping the occupants in place around bends.

Despite the XR2i's almost flagship status (and price!), its 'office' isn't notably superior to those of humbler Fiestas. Standard items include central locking, electric windows, a sunroof, an (electric) remote-control tailgate release and those extra lamps, but the sunroof doesn't slide and it lacks an internal sun-blind, and there's no adjustment for height or lumbar support on the seats. Alloy wheels, as fitted to our test car, are optional extras, too.

The test car was also fitted with the optional 'Quickclear' heated windscreen (£135) and mechanical anti-lock brakes (£435). They are both undoubted safety aids, but several members of our team disliked the heated screen because the fine wire filaments embedded in the glass tend to increase night-time dazzle from oncoming headlamps.

VERDICT

While the old XR2 was something of an imposter in the Junior hot-hatch ranks, the XR2i wins its place there on merit.

Despite our lack of euphoria, it's a big improvement over its predecessor: interior space and refinement are better, performance – particularly in the mid-range – is livelier, and its looks and image are spot-on.

Ultimately, however, it fails to really excite its driver, and that's a serious failing, because cars in this league are bought above all else for their enthusiast appeal. The fact is that the Fiesta's rivals all deliver stronger measures of the right stuff.

That said, the XR2i is bound to sell better than ever, for while Ford could do well to poach some top-class power unit and chassis engineers, its marketing machine is second to none.

Perhaps the RS Turbo will do the trick . . .

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	1/4 mile
	2.9	8.8	16.6

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.5	3.3	5.9	8.7
IN 5TH GEAR		5.6	11.3	16.4	22.3
IN 4TH GEAR		4.0	7.5	11.4	15.7

mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		11.5/8.1	10.8/7.4	11.0/8.2	

Maximum speeds

REV'S PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	32	6500*	6700	5800	5170

*for best acceleration

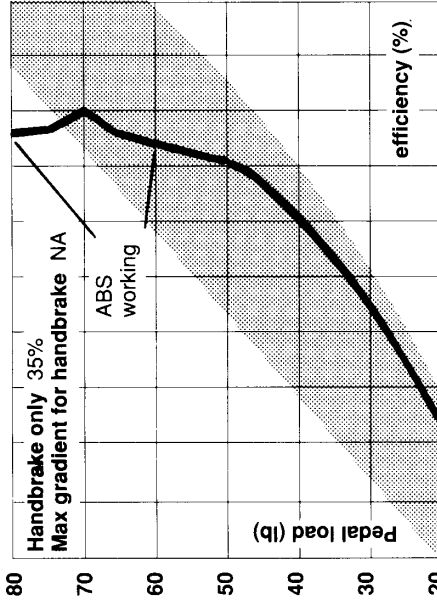
FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane unleaded

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	30 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	32
Motorway - 70mph cruising	37 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	37 1/2
Gentle driving - rural roads	43 1/2
Typical mpg overall	37 1/2
Realistic tank range*	40 litres/330 miles

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Safety check list

Steering	☒
Brakes	☒
Seatbelts	☒
Head restraints	☒
Interior	☒
Fuel	☒

Fade test

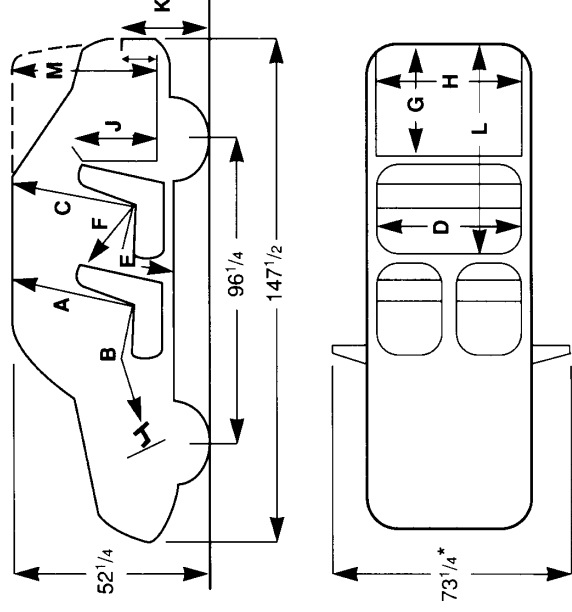
How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

30	At start of test
35	After constant use
65	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



*63 1/4 with mirrors folded

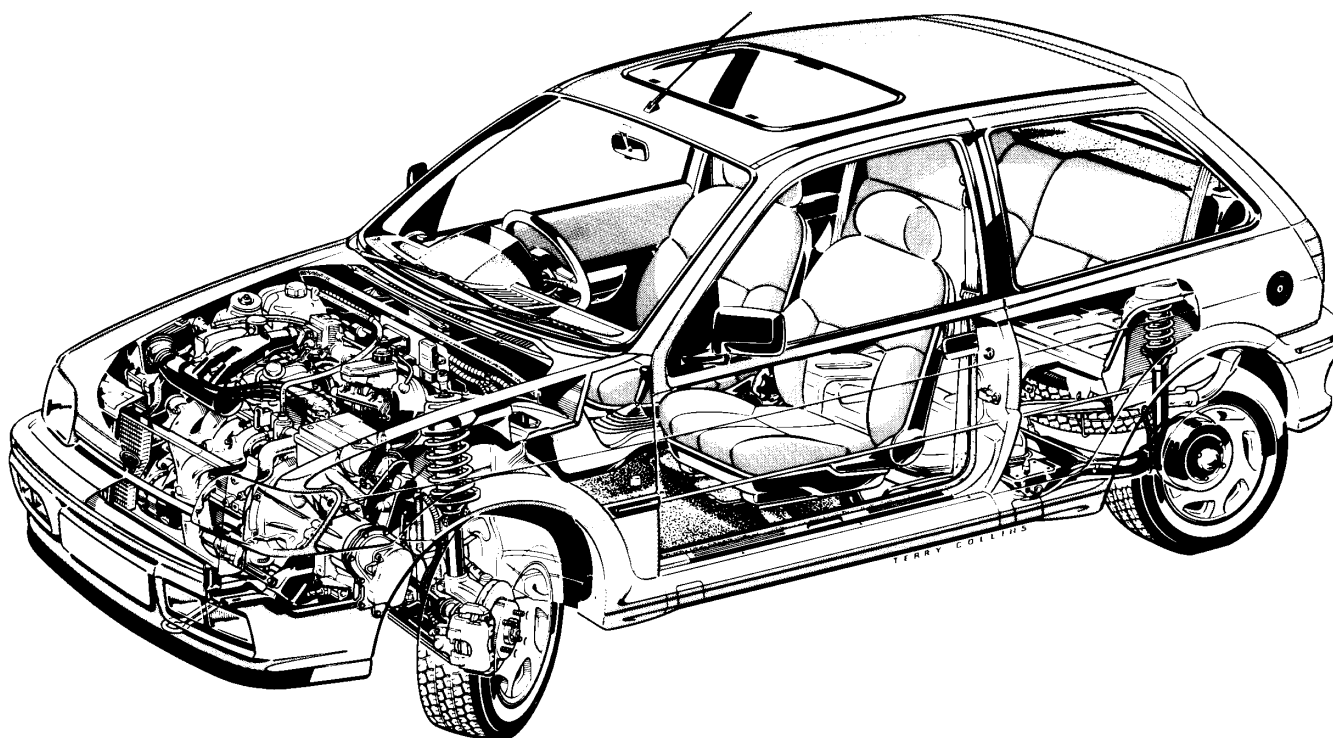
Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

2072	36 3/4	34-41	35 1/4	49	38	28	31 1/2
Inside (inches)	Front headroom	Front legroom (min - max)	Rear headroom	Back seat width (between armrests)	Typical rear legroom	Typical rear kneeroom	Load height (to tailgate hinge)
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Front headroom	Front legroom (min - max)	Rear headroom	Back seat width (between armrests)	Typical rear legroom	Typical rear kneeroom	Load height (to tailgate hinge)	Load height (to tailgate hinge)
36 3/4	34-41	35 1/4	49	38	28	31 1/2	31 1/2

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

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Ford Fiesta XR2i	1596/109	117	8.7	22.3/15.7	37 ¹ / ₂	99/70†	41	38/28	4.2/32 ¹ / ₂	147 ¹ / ₂
Peugeot 205GTi 1.6	1580/105*	118	8.7	17.1/12.7	35	98/50	40 ¹ / ₂	37/29 ¹ / ₄	3.8/33 ¹ / ₄	145 ³ / ₄
Renault 5GT Turbo	1397/115	123	7.5	22.7/13.6	34	97/33	39 ¹ / ₂	36/24	3.3/35	141 ¹ / ₂
Vauxhall Nova GTE 1.6i	1598/99	116	9.4	20.3/14.6	41	100/70	41	37 ¹ / ₂ /27 ¹ / ₄	3.8/32	142 ¹ / ₂
Peugeot 309GRi (5 door)	1580/113	118	9.2	22.3/16.0	32	85/45	41 ¹ / ₂	38 ¹ / ₂ /27 ¹ / ₂	3.3/34 ¹ / ₄ (p)	159 ¹ / ₂
* current version 115bhp						† with optional ABS			(p) = power assisted	



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 80.0mm bore x 79.5mm stroke = 1596cc. Aluminium alloy head and iron block; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 9.75:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Ford EEC IV electronic multi-point fuel injection. 42-litre (9.2-gallon) tank; no low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 95 octane minimum, leaded or unleaded

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, distributorless, integral with EEC IV engine management system

Maximum power (DIN-net) 109bhp at 6000rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 102 lb ft at 2800rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 8.7in dry plate, diaphragm spring; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 20 lb/5¹/₂in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.15, second 1.91, third 1.28, fourth 0.95, top 0.76 and reverse 3.62:1

Final drive 4.06:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 20.49 in top, 16.39 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3420 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts with coil springs and anti-roll bar. Rear: semi-independent, torsion-beam rear axle, trailing arms and coil spring/damper struts. Dampers: gas-filled telescopic all round

Steering unassisted rack and pinion with 4.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 32¹/₂ft between kerbs, with 64¹/₂ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5.5J steel (optional alloy on test car) with 185/60R 80H tyres (Pirelli P600 on test car)

Brakes 9.5in ventilated discs front, 8.0in drums rear with vacuum servo. Optional Lucas/Girling SCS (mechanical) anti-lock system fitted to test car