



Ford Mondeo



If you're thinking of buying a used Mondeo, we can help. We've delved into our breakdown, warranty and vehicle inspection service statistics covering the last few years and come up with what you need to know if you're planning to become the second owner.

THE CAVALIER MIGHT HAVE ENJOYED A spell of superiority in the Sierra's twilight years, but Ford was soon to regain its customary dominance in the sales charts when it launched the Sierra's brand new, front-wheel drive successor early in 1993.

The world wasn't quite ready for the Sierra's avant-garde, aerodynamic styling in its early days, but Ford's family favourite matured into a cherished workhorse of both private buyers and countless fleet managers. The Mondeo, however, heralded something of a watershed for Ford – marking a new beginning, where control of new car development was restored to engineers rather than accountants.

Its looks may be unspectacularly ordinary, but the Mondeo's talented blend of space, refinement and

sheer dynamic competence earned it rapturous acclaim straight out of the box. Four-door saloon and five-door hatchbacks offered 16-valve 1.6, 1.8 and two-litre Zetec engines from the outset, with the estate and a much subdued 1.8 turbo-diesel added later the same year. The muscular "Jekyll-and-Hyde" 2½-litre V6 flagship joined the fray towards the end of 1994.

For 1997, the Mondeo gained a much-needed styling fillip, with more distinctive extremities, along with a host of detailed revisions that make the latest versions run, ride and handle better than ever.

The main points to look for... **Engine**

All power units – even the once-raucous turbo-diesel – are sweeter than their forerunner's equivalents, delivering respectable pace, economy and refinement, whatever their size. Expect low-to-mid thirties, or better, economy from four-cylinder petrol engines, rising to an average of more like 45mpg on the diesel. The 1.6 can be a bit wheezy in this relatively weighty car, so look to the 1.8 and two-litre or, better still, a V6 if performance is a priority. Although some hard-worked examples may be quite "leggy" on mileage, oil and water leaks are untypical and major engine problems – so far, at least – are reassuringly rare.

Engine ancillaries and cooling system

As with many fleet favourites, a scrupulously stamped service history is well worth having, yet even a simple check like dipping the oil can provide a valuable insight to maintenance history; if it's gritty or gungy, it's past it – and so is the filter. Cooling system components, such as the water pump and thermostat, can give a few problems, and we've also heard of occasional misfiring and pinking problems on some 1.6 and 1.8 models. Being a relatively new car, the exhaust should still have some life left in it, but bear in mind that catalytic converters can be quite expensive when they do eventually need renewing. The cat, incidentally, can rattle at peak revs and there's no easy cure if it does.

Transmission

The drive-line, like much of the rest of the car, is generally easy-going and durable, but if the clutch has led a hard life, it won't last forever. Check for the expected silent, free-and-easy gear selection – you could end up with a costly bill for the gearbox, fixing bush, bearing or synchromesh ailments. We've encountered a few clutch cable and hydraulics problems, too, and it's worth a quick look at the driveshafts, to ensure timely discovery of any leaking or split CV joint gaiters.

Suspension, steering and brakes

The Mondeo is up with the best of them in terms of how nicely it goes down the road, but few people can have missed those TV tales of Mondeos that pull to the left. Subtle geometry, wheel alignment or tyre-related corrections seem to cure most offenders, but it's worth a quick check for any excessive road camber following or climbing, all the same. Uneven front tyre wear and the need for replacement power steering pumps or racks aren't unheard of, although in many cases, odd tyre wear may point more to the way a car's been driven rather than a mechanical defect. Front and rear wheel bearings, rear dampers and anti-roll bar links and bushes throw up occasional problems, but apart from the usual checks for fluid leaks, juddery action and scored discs, the brakes are reasonably trouble free.

Electrics and instruments

For some reason, faulty starter motors are by far the Mondeo's biggest shock-horror story, by showing significantly higher-than-average failure rates. Alternators – indeed most other components too – are, in comparison, relative paragons of virtue. If you check little else, at least cast an eye over the starter or give it an extra spin or two. Even if all seems well on the day, judging by our figures, there's an above average probability that you'll need to replace it sooner or later. Also check the fuel and water temperature gauges; we've met a few temperamental ones.

Bodywork

Saloon, hatch or estate, the Mondeo offers a vast diversity of models, power units and trim options. Hugely popular with fleets and leasing companies, many will have had to earn their keep – and then some, so you'll doubtless find plenty that will cause you to walk swiftly back in the direction you came from. We're talking workhorse, so with ample supplies available it pays to be picky. Bear in mind, however, that the Mondeo is less prone to displaying traditional high-mileage pointers, such as worn pedal rubbers, a stone-pecked nose or saggy seats. Central locking and electric windows (especially, though not surprisingly, the driver's window) can play up, too, so make sure that these and the other accessories all work.

Costs and servicing

Being a fleet car and one with a blue oval badge, the Mondeo has tightly reined running costs written all over it. It's not as DIY-friendly as the old Sierra when it's time to delve under the bonnet, but no-one matches Ford's extensive dealer network or competitive parts prices. The insurance groupings range from a very moderate 7 rating for an entry-level 1.6 up to a wallet-bashing group 16 premium for a loaded V6.

So to sum up...

The Mondeo's well rounded design and thoroughly pleasing road manners may not have quite the legs on the all-conquering Peugeot 406, but like its predecessor, Ford's family-sized holdall is, again – and deservedly – a firm favourite. Only its "one-on-every-street corner" commonness and, until the recent revamp, homespun looks really count against it. You get most for your money on cheaper versions, with something like the 1.8LX offering excellent all-round value. Bear in mind that hatches, estates and more conservative colours will be easier to shift on, later, while power freaks or keener drivers should treat themselves to the gutsy, yet surprisingly flexible, V6. As common as muck in some eyes, but safe as houses in many others.

We can't tell you which car to chose, but once you've found a model you like, we can provide reassurance by arranging a comprehensive check anywhere in the country by one of our Vehicle Inspection Engineers. Call 0345 500 610 for details of fees or to arrange an inspection. For longer term peace of mind we can also offer mechanical breakdown insurance. For further information, call AA Warranty Services on 0800 269 798