

Ford Puma

Featured model: 1.6i 16v



YOU'D HARDLY SIGN UP A dowdy looking, "shopping-trolley" supermini as first choice from which to conjure up a curvy little coupé, yet that's exactly what Ford did with the Puma.

Building on the Fiesta's abundant driving appeal, Ford's chassis gurus turned the highly competent (if hardly the roomiest) small hatch into the chic and highly desirable compact coupé the Puma has become.

Motive power, to begin with, comprised just a Yamaha-bred, 1.7-litre Zetec SE engine, but this was soon supplemented by a cooking 90bhp 1.4-litre Zetec from the Fiesta's underbonnet line-up.

The punier powerhouse has lately been superseded by a more powerful (103bhp) 1.6-litre version, which not only endows the entry-level Puma with a useful performance pep-up, but also meets the latest Euro IV emissions standards.

It's a largely successful swap, too. The baby Puma lacks a little of the 1.7's ultimate pizzazz, but the tractable, free-revving unit still musters sufficient perkiness to set-off the taut, nimble chassis. It may be a touch tardier, but the 1.6 mirrors the 1.7's fine driving experience in almost all other respects.

The 20bhp power deficit also drops the insurance rating a couple of notches. Together with a modest £700 saving over the 1.7 and the Puma's low all-round running costs, this helps to deliver sporting fun at an affordable price.

View the pint-sized prowler as a tasty two-plus-two – with space for a pair of

smallish adults in the back on shorter trips – and you won't go far wrong. Legroom is fair, but neither headroom nor the view out is especially obliging in the rear, and getting there calls for a bit of athleticism, hampered by the tilt-and-slide front seats' reluctance to push fully out of the way.

Considering its origins, the Puma's boot is surprisingly roomy. The back seat folds, but only in one piece on to a fixed rear cushion, while a prominent sill and restricted load aperture hinder loading larger items.

This aside, the Puma rewards with firm (but rarely harsh) suspension, rock-solid, vice-free handling and a really in-touch, communicative feel at the wheel, while ABS keeps braking surefooted – despite the slightly surprising fitment of drum brakes only at the rear.

Streets more enjoyable to drive than even the amply able Fiesta it's based on, the Puma is frisky, fun and frugal. The only *real* question is whether to pick the "full house" 1.7, or the cheaper, slightly slower but only marginally inferior 1.6.

VERDICT

With a spacious, all-new and more stylish-looking Fiesta soon upon us, the Puma's days are numbered. Given this new platform, however, and the delectable little number Ford produced first time round, the Mark Two Puma should be out of this world. There will be one, Ford, won't there?

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Controls/displays	★★★★○
Safety	★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★★★★
Comfort	★★★★○
Fuel Economy	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1596cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 103bhp at 6000rpm, 107 lb ft at 4500rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 20.6mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.4 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs and anti-roll bar. Rear: semi-independent twist beam, trailing arms and coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 10.3m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.2m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with standard ABS with EBD brake-force distribution and low-speed traction control

wheels/tyres 6in 9-spoke alloy with 195/50R15 82V tyres (Pirelli P6000 on test car); full-size (steel) spare

LIKES ...

fun combined with daily practicality
smooth, tractable mid-range delivery
round gear knob – but not if it's cold
now has 3-year/60,000-mile warranty

and GRIPES

mediocre fuel tank capacity
driver's seat high/fixed steering wheel
folding back seat lacks versatility
Ford is to stop making it!

THE PUMA RANGE

size and type supermini coupé (mid-priced)

trim levels one (undesignated)

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/103bhp, 4/1.7/125

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; no automatic option

OVERTAKING ABILITY				☆☆☆○○	
<i>At its best between 2000 and 4000rpm, but ultimately lacks the 1.7's top-end vigour and hearty hunger for revs. Still, it's a game little unit and brings a likeable lift to the cheaper Puma's pace</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	3.3	5.4	8.0	11.7	
30-50mph	4.1	5.2	7.7	10.9	
40-60mph	5.1	5.3	7.8	10.9	
50-70mph	6.2	5.9	8.1	11.8	
30-70mph	10.3	11.1	15.8	22.7	
max speed in each gear (*using 6250rpm) for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	31	51	76	102	118

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○				
<i>Roomy considering Fiesta origins, with passable space for a pair in the rear. One-piece folding back seat, fixed cushion and resultant uneven load floor mar ultimate (or mixed) load convenience</i>				
<i>in centimetres (3-door coupé)</i>				
outside		inside	(† without sunroof)	
length	398	front	- legroom	85-109
width - inc mirrors	184		- headroom	93-98 †
- mirrors folded	172	rear	- typical leg/	95/
height (no roof bars)	135		kneeroom	67
load sill height	34/83		- headroom	88
(inside/outside)			- hiproom	109
steering		load space (all seats in use)		
turns lock-to-lock	2.8		(litres/cu ft)	250/8.8
turning circle (metres)	10.3	load length		64-139
easy to park/garage?	★★★★○	full length to fascia		No
		load width		88-98
		load height (to shelf/		44-47/
		to top of aperture)		71

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○	
<i>White dials, leather wheel and “that” gear knob subtly strengthen sports coupé slant. Steering wheel is fixed, though, and high-set seat mars comfort (and a full view of the dials) for taller drivers</i>	
	

HOW THE PUMA 1.6 COMPARES		engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes† – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
FORD PUMA 1.6 16V 3DR COUPÉ		4/1596/103	3390	10.3	22.7/15.8	37½	25/17	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
Honda Civic 1.6 16v 5dr		4/1590/110	3550	10.5	24.5/17.8	42½	26½/16	107	102/76	2.8/11.6	429
Peugeot 206 2.0 GTi 3dr		4/1997/137	3430	7.2	16.7/12.4	35	25/20	108	94/66	3.1/10.8	384
Peugeot 307 1.6 16v 3dr¹		4/1587/110	3500	10.3	26.0/17.4	37½	26½/12	107	95/71	2.9/10.9	420
Renault Megane Coupé 2.0ide 16v		4/1998/140	3270	8.2	19.6/14.1	36	25½/42	108	88/59	3.1/10.4	397
Ford Puma 1.7 16v 3dr coupé		4/1679/123	3565	8.6	18.9/13.2	37	24½/32	109	95/67	2.8/10.3	398
¹ figures for 5dr version		† all with ABS									

SAFETY		★★★★								
<i>Traction control, top-notch brakes and agile, vice-free handling result in strong dynamic performance. Absence of rear head restraints and centre seatbelt less impressive, though; passenger airbag extra</i>										
braking	dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>									
pedal feel	★★★★○									
in emergency	★★★★○									
handbrake	★★★○○									
		<table><tr><th>pedal load</th><th>distance</th></tr><tr><td>unhurried 10kg</td><td>57m</td></tr><tr><td>sudden 17kg</td><td>25m <i>best stop</i></td></tr><tr><td>+4kg ie 21kg</td><td>26m <i>ABS on</i></td></tr></table>	pedal load	distance	unhurried 10kg	57m	sudden 17kg	25m <i>best stop</i>	+4kg ie 21kg	26m <i>ABS on</i>
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EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Puma not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking ✓	alarm ✓
remote control ✓	immobiliser ✓
auto window closure ✗	luggage security ★★★★○
deadlocks ✓	
✓ standard	0 factory option ✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★	
<i>Slick, nimble chassis, swift, tactile helm and firm, surefooted ride are not only great fun, but great safety aids, too. Fiesta's a fine foundation and Puma fully merits its top-drawer, five-star rating</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★★★○	
<i>Hip-hugging seats feel good; taut, well-controlled ride impresses, too, despite Puma's squat 50-Series tyres. Rear access marred by lack of grab handles and front seats' laziness to slide</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY

★★★★○

Matches 1.7's modest thirst for unleaded, but little more, despite 1.6's more sedate pace. Meagre fuel tank limits useful range, but (lockable) high-set filler compensates with easy, spill-free refuelling

AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	26	urban	29.7
best (gentle/rural)	46	extra urban	47.1
overall mpg on test	37½	combined	38.7
realistic tank capacity	38 litres	CO ₂ emissions	171g/km
typical range	310 miles	car tax band	C