



Seat Ibiza 1.4i Salsa



What's different?

Seat's saucy version of the Ibiza, powered by a 60bhp, 1.4-litre engine. Available as either a three- or five-door model, it's well equipped and priced midway between the 1.4CLS and the sporty 75bhp 1.6S.

SEAT, LIKE SKODA, HAS GROWN FROM strength to strength since being wooed from Fiat into Volkswagen's multi-national empire. By beating the new Polo into the showrooms by almost a year, the Ibiza gave a foretaste of Volkswagen's variation on the same basic design.

Unlike the previous Ibiza, which never really fulfilled its promise, the current version impressed

from the word go. It shares engines, body platform and a lot of fixtures and fittings with the Polo. But far from the Ibiza being just a badge-engineered clone of the Polo, the stylists and designers have cleverly created a separate identity and appeal for each model.

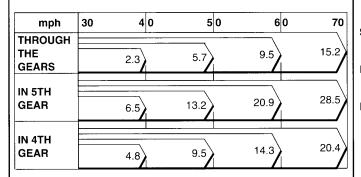
Whereas the Polo's more conservative lines offer just three- and five-door hatchbacks at present, the Ibiza tops this with a parallel line-up of booted saloons called the Cordoba. The Ibiza may not be able to equal the Polo's long-established heritage, but it's more keenly priced and, so far at least, offers a wider engine choice, with a nippy 1.9 diesel plus a pair of racy GT versions supplementing the Polo's 1.0-, 1.4- and 1.6-litre petrol units.

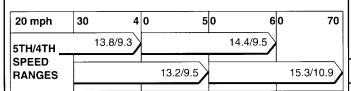
Having previously tested the 1.6S version (see R9428), we've returned to sample a three-door 60bhp 1.4-litre version, this time. The 1.4 Salsa (strange name

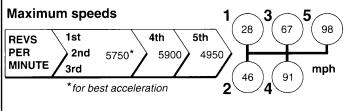
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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds







FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	32 ¹ / ₂ /49
Typical mpg overall	37 ¹ / ₂
Realistic tank range*	40 litres/330 miles

^{*}based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse four cylinder with iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Size 75.0mm x 78.7mm = 1391cc

Power 60bhp at 5200rpm

Torque 79 lb ft at 2400rpm

Valves belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition Bosch Monotronic electronic single-point fuel injection, fully programmed ignition via coil and distributor. 47-litre fuel tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 19.9 in 5th, 15.4 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent, MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones. Rear: torsion-beam axle, trailing arms. coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round

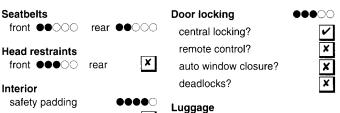
Steering power-assisted (standard on all models except 1.05CL) rack and pinion, with 3.2 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.1m between kerbs, with 15.6m circle for one turn of the wheel

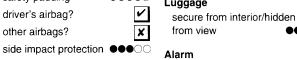
Wheels 51/2J steel with 175/70R13 82T tyres (Michelin MXT), Michelin TEX compact emergency spare

Brakes solid discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo. (ABS standard on 1.8GT 16-valve only)

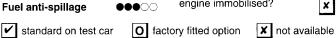
SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

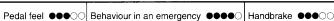




from view X Alarm engine immobilised? X

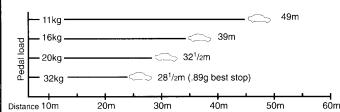






Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (no ABS)

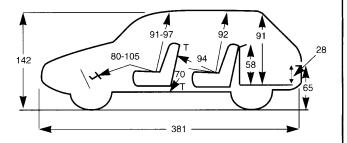
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



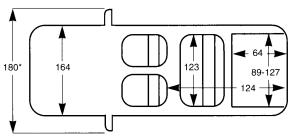
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 18½kg at start of test, 22½kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

DIMENSIONS

Centimetres



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*160 with mirrors folded

for a model designation, but there you go) comes with tinted glass, central locking, a tilt-and-slide glass sunroof, driver's airbag and height-adjustable driver's seat and steering wheel over the mid-range CLS, in return for a £900 premium. The extra rear doors add about £400, should you want them.

The 1.4, unsurprisingly, isn't as brisk off the mark as the 1.6, but it has a generous spread of pulling power and its sweet, refined nature still offers plenty of appeal. Lower, "busier" gearing, combined with its hearty mid-range urge largely disguises the 1.4's 25 per cent power deficit in the higher gears, all but matching its bigger-engined stablemate's sprightliness.

Although it's not particularly quick in absolute terms, the 1.4 delights with a similar sporty "feel" to more powerful versions, aided by its taut, responsive handling, precise, nicely-weighted power steering and reassuring brakes. The 1.4's more modest tyre size brings a shade more compliance to the firm, though well-controlled ride, and seems to quell the 1.6's prominent tyre roar over coarse surfaces a little, too.

The Ibiza's sporty nature is reflected at the fuel pumps, though. The 37½mpg we averaged with the 1.4 shows some expected gains over the 1.6's disappointing 35½mpg, but significantly trails the 40-plus mpg most of the Ibiza's rivals deliver. It responds better to the gentle touch, however, with almost 50mpg possible on sedate jaunts.

Getting to and from the three-door's back seat is hindered by fixed front seat bases and bigger, more cumbersome doors. The Cordoba saloon and the five-door are both more helpful in this respect, with the bonus of slimmer centre pillars that prove less obstructive at junctions. Once installed, rear seat passengers don't fair too badly, but the Ibiza can't rival the Fiat Punto or Vauxhall Corsa, for instance, when it comes to accommodating longer legs.

The hatchback is eclipsed by its saloon counterpart for boot space. There's reasonable room for the shopping, but the high-ish sill and restricted aperture are a bit of a hindrance when loading, while the flat floor and fair load height come at the expense of a space-saver wheel.

From the Salsa upwards, the Ibiza offers side-impact bars, seat belt travel-limiters, "anti-submarining" seat shaping and a driver's airbag, but an alarm is conspicuous by its absence, and only the sporty GT versions get an immobiliser.

VERDICT

Superminis have improved in leaps and bounds over the last few years, as the Ibiza's advance over its mediocre predecessor amply demonstrates. In 1.4-litre form, it's not especially roomy, quick or economical. But this solid little supermini packs in all the essentials, it has an endearing power unit and offers a lot of driver appeal. For sheer refinement and finesse, it's perhaps a notch or two behind its Polo cohort, but with the advantage of a pair of sporty GT versions and a diesel, and costing at least £1000 less, it out-points its partner in other ways.

Likes . . . and gripes

Cute looks and solid, sporty "feel" ● Back seat rather cramped

Power steering on most models ● • "Back-to-front" lighting switch

Smooth, eager engine . . . but mediocre fuel economy

Tall, roomy boot . . . but split-fold back seat only on dearer models

HOW THE IBIZA COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	kneeroom -	Steering turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
Seat Ibiza 1.4i Salsa (3-door)	1391/60	3535	15.2	28.5/20.4	371/2	281/2/32	105	94/70	3.2/10.1 (p)	381
Fiat Punto 75SX (3-door)	1242/75	3645	13.7	33.6/23.1	42	261/2/16	105	102/71	4.4/10.2	376
Nissan Micra 1.0LX (3-door)	998/55	3870	16.5	35.4/26.0	43	29/15	103	94/66	3.7/9.7	370
Renault Clio 1.4RN (5-door)	1390/80	3505	11.7	28.0/19.3	411/2	341/2/17	100	93/64	3.4/10.4 (p)	371
Vauxhall Corsa 1.4i LS (3-door)	1389/60	3260	14.3	30.3/21.1	42	25/13	104	100/67	4.1/9.8	373
VW Polo 1.3L (3-door)†	1296/55	3710	16.7	26.8/20.4	421/2	241/2/23	105	95/67	3.8/10.1	372
Seat Ibiza 1.6S (5-door)	1598/75	3380	13.3	27.5/20.4	351/2	25/32	105	94/70	3.1/10.1 (p)	381
† 1.3 litre/55bhp replaced by 1.4 litre/60bhp								(p) = power	steering	