



Ford Fiesta ST

No compromise, no regrets

Review | First the conclusion: many brands offer hot hatches, but only Ford offers a small sports car. Yet the recipe is the same in either case: take a small hatchback, give it a huge engine and alter the suspension of the car so it can cope with the extra power. What did Ford do differently?

Again, first the answer and then the explanation. Ford didn't compromise. Sporty hatchbacks from other brands try to be both sporty and comfy at the same time. Whenever a choice had to be made, Ford always chose sportiness.

Of course the Ford Fiesta ST isn't a true race car. That would mean it had a roll cage and it was devoid of all creature comforts. The "ST" is still suitable for everyday traffic and it offers all luxuries and safety features a car in this price range should.



The changes in the cabin can even be described as modest. The steering wheel, the pedals and the gear lever have been replaced by more sporty looking ones. This is just to improve the looks, it doesn't do anything to improve performance. The Fiesta ST doesn't have extra cages, dials, a race computer or other trickery to give the driver extra insight into the inner workings of the car.

On top of the dashboard a small screen is mounted which is used for satnav, audio and communication.

The Ford Focus uses the exact same display, but also shows information on a second screen between the speedometer and rev counter. The Fiesta has to cope with just this one screen and it proves to be too small to display all necessary information.



The only useful change in the interior is the furniture: the Fiesta ST is fitted with Recaro bucket seats that offer lots of lateral support. This is the first point where Ford really dared to choose, because those who do not fit in the seats simply do not fit in the car. The safety belts cannot be adjusted in height, which also means this car isn't comfortable for everyone. The huge front seats do go at the expense of the legroom in the rear.

Handling

The bucket seats serve a purpose: the Fiesta ST can corner so violently that a special seat is a necessity rather than a luxury! The exceptional handling is thanks to its sports suspension. Compared to a basic Fiesta the ST sits 15 mm closer to the ground and runs on bespoke Bridgestone Potenza tyres.



Suspension is much firmer as well. On bad roads the ST makes its occupants feel every bump in the road - amplified. This is uncomfortable for the passengers, and that's soft-peddalling it. The driver doesn't mind, he/she knows that the reward for this lack of comfort is sublime handling.

The steering isn't just more direct, it also reacts quicker on the driver's input. An electronic differential with limited slip distributes the power of the engine over the left and right front wheels. In a corner the outer wheel has to travel a longer distance than the inner wheel. By distributing the engine power variably, the feeling in the steering wheel is improved and understeer is avoided (or at least postponed).



Electronics

Ford named this system "Torque Vectoring Control" and it is one of the very few high-tech features of the Fiesta ST. And that is what distinguishes this car from its rivals: Ford always chooses a mechanical solution over an electrical one. This is why the Fiesta ST provides more feedback to the driver and feels more like a true race car.

Whether this makes the Fiesta ST quicker strongly depends on the skills of the driver. Mistakes are punished much harder (braking in the corner is a real no-no) than with other hot hatches.

Because Ford installs a traditional, manual gearbox there's no "Launch Control" available and yet again it all comes down to the driver.

In second gear the ST cannot reach 100 km/h (62 mph), which affects the time it takes to accelerate from zero to 100 km/h. The six-speed gearbox (the only one in a Fiesta) is also used in other Ford models; only the end reduction has been altered for the ST.



Engine

The engine can also be found in other Ford models. It is a 1.6 litre turbo engine which develops 182 PS / 240 Nm. That seems less than its rivals, but this has to do with rules and regulations in Europe. For 20 seconds the engine can actually develop 200 PS. Because European measurements require more than a short burst, the official numbers say this car "only" develops 182 PS.

Much more important than the theoretical performance, is the actual character of the car. Ford changed the throttle response and other parameters of the engine to make it more fierce in the Fiesta ST. The engine now is more than aggressive and this car wants to perform wherever, whenever. This car is so fast, that it is actually a challenge to drive it slowly!



To increase the fun, the intake manifold is connected to the cabin to create a more spectacular sound inside the car.

Brakes

As soon as the throttle is released, the ST decreases speed so violently that it seems like braking. Of course the brakes themselves have been beefed up as well to match the potential of the engine. The ST has disc brakes front and rear, which can stop the car as if an anchor had been thrown out. The result is sheer brutality and aggression, as it should be with a vehicle like this.

Whether all of this is enough to outperform its rivals, remains to be seen. Other brands offer even stronger engines and combine those with all the electronic gadgets imaginable to improve performance. However, when it comes to sheer fun to drive there's no doubt that the Fiesta ST beats them all.



Conclusion

The Ford Fiesta has recently been upgraded for 2013. This means the sporty Fiesta ST also got a second lease in life. Compared to other hot hatches the Ford Fiesta ST doesn't just look more sporty, it actually is. With the Fiesta ST, Ford doesn't offer a car that is both comfortable and sporty, performance always comes first. This means the ride is more than firm and the car is downright aggressive. And yes, this can be very tiresome.

Whenever faced with the choice, Ford went for a mechanical solution rather than an electrical one every time. This means the driver has more feeling with the car, but also has to work harder to get the most out of it. The result is that the Fiesta ST is a small sports car, rather than just another hot hatch. ■

