



Ford Focus

One size fits all?

Car review | It is quite a challenge. The Ford Focus is the best handling car in its class and yet this car had to be redesigned from scratch. To face this challenge Ford choose an unusual approach. The new Focus has been designed by the team with members from all over the world. In this way the car should appeal to such a large audience, that one and the same Focus can be sold everywhere. Does this mean the Focus as lost its edge or has it become even better than before?

The purpose of designing a car that can be sold all over the world is to reduce costs. This is supposed to bring innovative technology within reach of a larger audience. The promised technology is mainly about safety. When fitted with the right options, a true arsenal of cameras, radars and infrared sensors watches over the safety of the occupants.

New technology

The most obvious new feature is a camera that reads traffic signs. For example, the current speed limit is shown as a reminder in a display between the speedometer and rev counter. This may come in handy especially on unfamiliar territory. The computer recognises all traffic signs properly; even in situations where there is one speed limit for lorries and one for regular cars, the system has a smart solution.



Like the phrase says, "Lane Keeping Aid" helps the driver keep in his or her lane. With a push of a button the driver can choose just a warning (vibration in the steering wheel) or an active correction when accidentally crossing the lines on the road. The latter doesn't mean the computer takes over the steering wheel completely. Instead, crossing the lines makes steering heavier while returning to the lane is made easy. This aid also works very well. The only problem is on twisting roads where the power steering may be lighter or heavier than the driver expects, because the computer fails to predict the lines around the bend.

When using cruise control, radar will automatically

keep a safe distance from the car in front, even if it slows down. When the driver is in control of the throttle, the computer issues a warning when the distance from the car in front is dangerously small. Up to speeds of 30 km/h the Focus can fully automatically brake for an obstacle.

Up to now, some of these features were only available on top class limousines and not in a modest hatchback like the Ford Focus. Even better: not all technology from the Focus is available on Ford's own top model: the Mondeo!



Design

The visual appearance of the Focus should appeal to a global audience and that is why a lot of compromises had to be made. Its appearance is unbalanced and doesn't feature the same elegant lines that make other Fords look desirable at first glance. However, the designer gives a completely different explanation. He states that the Focus is a more dynamic car and that should be reflected in its looks.

The cabin also doesn't feel familiar at first. The number of buttons and stalks is huge. The steering wheel alone has two layers of push buttons on either side and two sets of "arrow keys" in the heart. The centre console is littered with controls as well.



Despite its somewhat chaotic layout, the design does have a certain logic to it. The symbols on all buttons quickly make sense, so after just a few minutes of driving all new gadgetry is in use.

The room in the Focus is fine, but no more than average. The headrests of the back seat are too low for adults, so they do not contribute to safety and merely hit the neck annoyingly. The new Focus is positioned as a family car, and so there's only a five-door version available and no longer a three-door.



Diesel

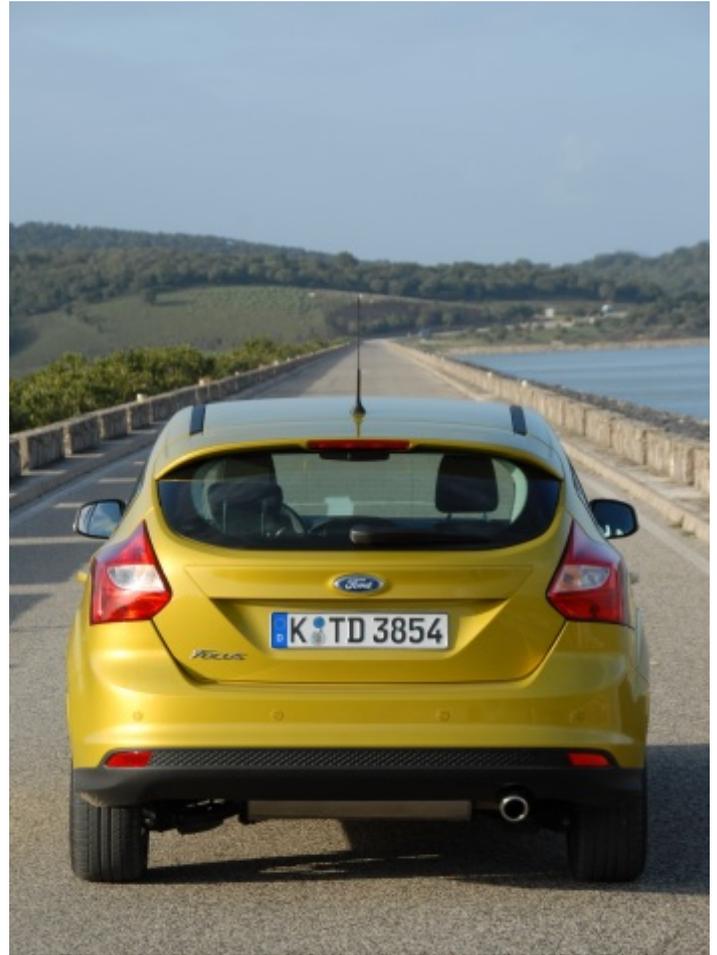
Green credentials are more important than ever, so that is what the new engines are made for. Even the basic diesel engine is already more frugal than the extra efficient "ECONetic" version of the last Focus.

For this first test drive only the strongest engines were

available. First the 163 PS / 340 Nm strong 2.0 litre diesel engine with six-speed automatic gearbox was tried. The automatic has a dual clutch, which makes it shift gears quicker while saving fuel at the same time.



Regrettably the "Powershift" gearbox isn't in tune with the driver and always shifts too early or too late. The solution is for the driver to shift sequentially, but that can only be done by a cumbersome switch on the side of the gear lever.



With the strongest diesel engine under the bonnet, the Focus still isn't a particularly aggressive or exciting car. The Focus performs with so much ease, that the occupants hardly realise how quick the car actually is (0-62 mph takes 8.6 seconds, top speed is 210 km/h). The actual fuel mileage on long distances was 6.1 litres per 100 km. Because there's no stop/start mechanism, the average fuel economy soared to 7.5 litres per 100 km after some city traffic.

Petrol

For now, all petrol engines have a displacement of 1.6 litres. By altering the engine management or adding a turbo the maximum output differs from 105 to 180 PS. No matter what specification, all petrol engines promise the same fuel economy and same CO2 exhaust (139 gr/km).



For this review the 180 PS strong "EcoBoost" engine was driven and it has a special character. It delivers its maximum power at a very high engine speed, while its maximum torque is available from a very low engine speed. This translates into an engine that is very strong, but certainly not aggressive. The needle of the rev counter can drop to just 1,600 rpm and even then there's plenty of torque available. Only when that same needle is sent all the way to the red area of the dial, this fastest Focus shows its sporty side.

Because the "1.6 EcoBoost" is only eager at high revs, many drivers will be tempted to drive in a low gear for too long (thus using more fuel than necessary). This is why Ford fits a shift indicator and an "eco coach". This coach rewards driving calmly, shifting in time and anticipating traffic by means of green petals on a flower in the display.



The engines with manual transmission do have a stop/start system to reduce emissions in city traffic. This system works quickly and almost unnoticeably, exactly like it should. Despite a very demanding test route (twisting mountain roads in the south of Spain) the average fuel consumption was limited to a fairly decent 6.5 litres per 100 km.

Handling

The one point that made the Focus stand out from the competition has always been its handling. As a general rule a car is either sporty or comfortable. The Focus manages to combine both better than any other car. On bad surfaces the car offers sufficient comfort levels, while grip is so good that braking for corners is almost optional. On top of that, the feeling in the steering wheel is exceptionally good: the driver knows and feels what the car is capable of and where the limits are.

Compared to the previous Focus, handling hasn't been improved that much, but the same performance is offered with more ease. Driving fast takes less of an effort, while the car offers even more comfort on long distances.



Conclusion

Ford has designed the new Focus so that it can be sold without any modification all over the world. This reduces costs, which makes new technology affordable to a larger audience. Ford largely succeeded in this approach. The only weak point is its appearance, which is clearly a compromise to appeal to every taste. The dashboard is an ergonomic jigsaw puzzle, but after a few days the driver is used to it.

The most important goals have been reached without a doubt. The Focus does indeed offer features that were only available in a higher segment up to now. This doesn't only make life with the Focus more pleasant, but much safer. Although less visible, the technology under the bonnet is also innovative. The Focus is frugal, without affecting performance. What remains the same is its excellent handling, which makes this new Focus the best drivers' car in its segment once again. So one size can indeed fit all. ■



Specifications

Ford Focus 1.6T Titanium

Size and weight



Length x width x height	436 x 182 x 148 cm
Wheelbase	265 cm
Kerb weight	1.333 kg
Trailer	665 kg
Trailer - braked	1.500 kg
Fuel capacity	55 l
Luggage space	277/1148 l
Tyre size	215/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1596 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	150 PS @ 5700 rpm
Max torque	240 Nm @ 1600 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.6 secs
Top speed	210 km/h
Average mileage	6 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	7.7 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	5 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	139 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 19,745
Price base model	Â£ 15,995