

Ford Fiesta Diesel

Featured model: 1.8TDdi LX 5 door



IN AN IMAGE-DRIVEN WORLD, THINGS aren't always what they seem. Take small cars for instance. By now we've all been subjected to the sexy suggestiveness of the Clio and Saxo adverts, witnessed the cross-gender rivalry generated by the Punto, while noting that the humble new Skoda Fabia is trying to get in on the trendy party. So why take a five-year-old like the Fiesta seriously, when there's one on every street corner? The reason is simple – it's arguably still quite the nicest handling, sweetest-engined small hatchback on offer.

This test is not of the delightful Zetec-engined petrol version, however, but the latest direct-injection diesel, which, with 1753cc and turbocharging, manages to equal the 75bhp of the 1242cc petrol model.

Its figures certainly don't put it ahead of its rivals and it's not the quietest, either, yet the quality of the sound isn't offensive to those inside and they're not subject to the vibrancy at low revs, to which so many diesels are prone.

No, you can step on the accelerator from 35mph in top (or 27 in fourth) and enjoy willing and smooth response. Motorway cruising is effortless, too, although in fact this Fiesta's engine turns over faster at 70mph than most small diesels; that may account for the disappointing mpg in such use.

Apart from this diesel, a sportier Fiesta 1.6 Zetec has been introduced in the last year, plus a mild make-over to the entire range's exterior styling and interior kit. The

latter makes this LX version keener value than before, with power-steering, air con and a heated windscreen price-inclusive. There are also subtle improvements to front seat support and adjustment, useful additional warning lamps (one that improves fuel tank range, for instance), so up-front, the Fiesta is extremely civilised.

It also steers, corners and rides supremely well, with little compromise in this weightier diesel. More's the pity, therefore, that rear trim and accommodation remain deficient. Seat folding is complicated by dangling seatbelts, the cushion is fixed and there's too much painted metal on show. The heater can't tier air to give cooler face-level delivery, neither does it change temperature instantly; be warned that the air con button can add 10 per cent to your mid-summer fuel bills, too.

VERDICT

If you just look at the cold statistics, the Fiesta is an also-ran among a gaggle of newer, more stylish and versatile small hatchbacks. Get in and go for a ride, however, and the impression changes - it's the way that it moves and inter-relates to the driver that still makes a big impression, whether petrol or diesel. With residual values plummeting and servicing and spare parts cheaper than most, it's an especially rewarding secondhand buy.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆○○○
Fuel economy	☆☆☆☆○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆○○○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1753cc 4 cylinder diesel; 75bhp at 4000rpm, 103 lb ft at 2500rpm. Belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves. Direct-injection diesel with turbocharger

transmission five-speed manual, front wheel drive. 24.3mph/1000rpm in 5th. 19.3 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock, 10.1m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.2m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with optional ABS on test car

wheels/tyres 5J steel with 175/65R14T tyres. Full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

fully variable heater direction controls
easy-to-set radio/cassette
facia styling aids passenger's access

belt tags hard to locate
third brake light blocks mirror view
still only one year's warranty

THE FIESTA RANGE

body 3- and 5-door supermini hatchback
trim levels Encore, Finesse, Zetec, LX, Zetec S, Ghia
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1299cc/60bhp, 4/1242/75bhp, 4/1388/90bhp, 4/1596/103bhp diesel: 4/1753/75bhp
drive front via 5-speed manual; continuously variable (CVT) auto option

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>Disappointing acceleration through gears, with lower gearing to help in-gear progress. Excellent gear shift and clutch</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	4.5	9.8	15.6		
30-50mph	5.8	9.2	12.8		
40-60mph	7.2	10.0	13.2		
50-70mph	9.6	11.0	15.6		
30-70mph	15.4	20.2	28.4		
max speed in each gear (*using 4250 rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	25	40½	61	82	100

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★☆☆○○			
<i>Rear occupants' space and seat-folding arrangements should be better; cheap trimming back there, too</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>		<i>inside († without sunroof)</i>	
outside		front - legroom	85-105
length	383	- headroom	91-96 †
width - inc mirrors	179	rear - typical leg/	93
* - exc mirrors	164	kneeroom	67
height (no roof bars)	132	- headroom	35
load sill height		- hiproom	119-121
(inside/outside)	17/67	load space (litres/cu ft)	
steering		(all seats in use)	305/10.7
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	load length	58-123
turning circle (metres)	10.1	full length to fascia	no
easy to park/garage?		load width	90-112
	★☆☆○○	load height (to shelf)	51
* mirrors don't fold		(to top of aperture)	81

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★☆☆★★	
<i>Good seat adjustments and support; excellent controls and fascia layout don't date. Heated front and rear screens, but no intermittent rear wiper on LX</i>	
	

HOW THE FIESTA DIESEL COMPARES	engine cap/power (cyl/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 FIESTA 1.8 TDDi	4/1753/75	2880	15.4	28.4/20.2	52½	26/18*	105	93/67	2.8/10.1	383
Fiat Punto 1.9 JTD	4/1910/80	2330	14.2	25.4/17.1	51½	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.9	384
Peugeot 206 D turbo	4/1997/90	2600	11.4	19.8/14.4	52½	26½/8	108	94/66	3.3/10.1	384
VW Polo 1.4 TDi	3/1422/75	2650	13.3	22.8/15.4	62	26/26*	108	93/66	2.9/10.1	374
Seat Ibiza 1.9 TDi †	4/1896/90	2400	11.3	21.7/15.1	57	28/32	109	97/72	3.1/10.1	385
Vauxhall Astra 1.7 DTi	4/1686/75	2675	14.0	32.3/20.5	56½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
† 1998 version						*with ABS				

SAFETY ★★★☆☆	
<i>Optional anti-lock brakes produce reliable stopping power and are fade resistant under duress; excellent handbrake</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ★★★☆☆	from 50mph (with optional ABS)
in emergency ★★★☆☆	pedal load
handbrake ★★★☆☆	10kg 38½
	18kg 26m best stop
	+4kg ie 22kg 26½m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS(3-door/1997 test)	
overall ★★★☆☆	pedestrian rating ★☆☆○○

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★☆	
<i>Still offers something special to keen drivers. Agility, poise and grip are not achieved via a nasty ride, either</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★★☆☆	
<i>Rides the bumps better than most and front seats support well; rears OK if you're not too tall. Reasonably quiet and smooth. Standard air con on LX.</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★☆☆	
<i>Only average, with lower gearing compromising motorway thirst. Easy filler with reliable low-level warning lamp</i>	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	34½
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	46
motorway (70mph cruising)	46½
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	55½
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	65
typical mpg overall	52½
realistic tank capacity/range	35 litres/400 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	40.4/65.7/53.3
CO ₂ emissions 144g/km	car tax band A