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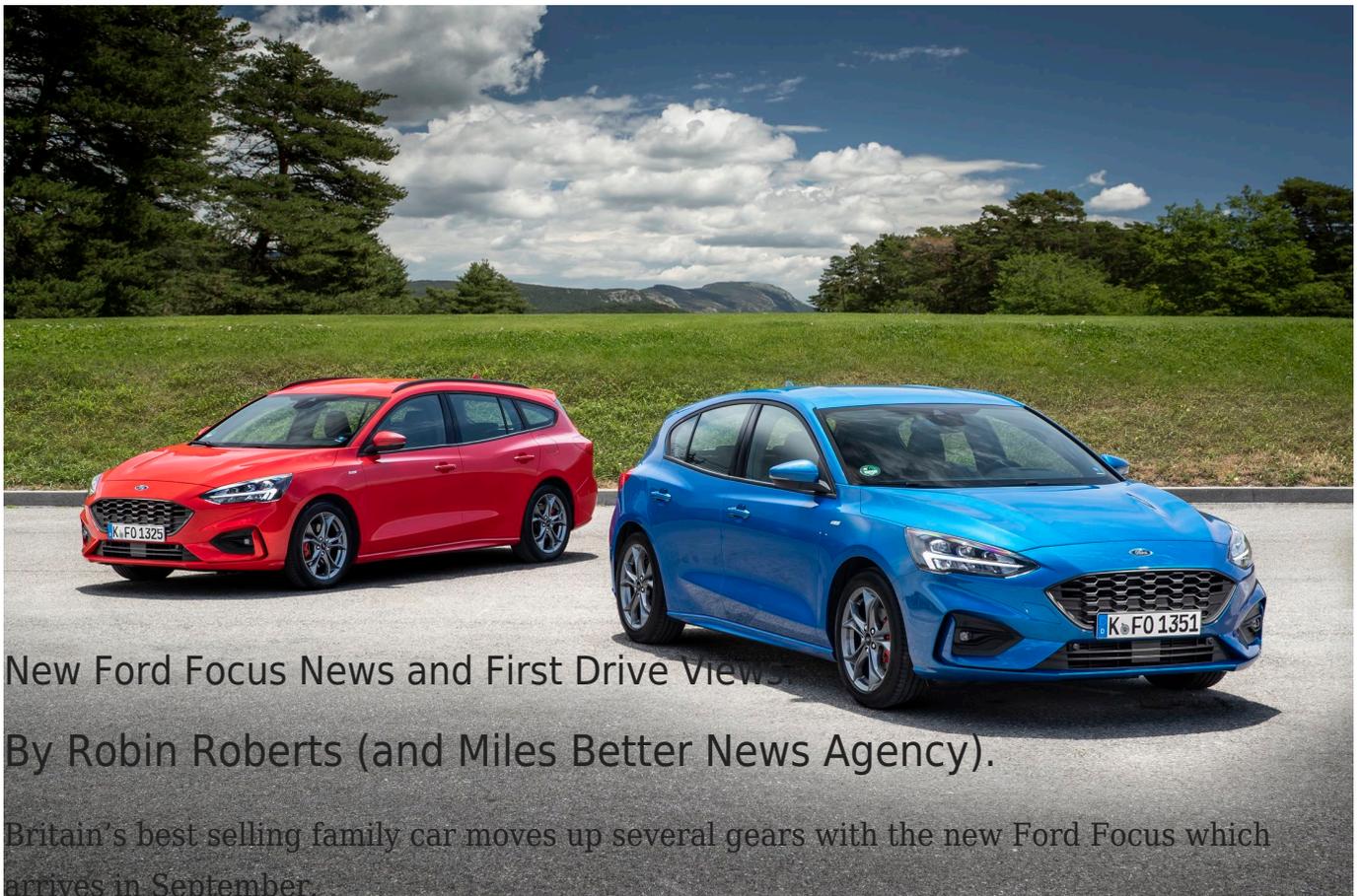
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Latest Ford Focus – First Impressions

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New Ford Focus News and First Drive Views
By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Britain's best selling family car moves up several gears with the new Ford Focus which arrives in September.

Building on its reputation for good handling from its launch 20 years ago, the newest generation is brimming with the latest technology under the all-new stronger bodies, including the latest Ecoboost 1.5 petrol engines from Bridgend, Wales.



The new Focus represents a €600 million investment at Ford's Saarlouis assembly plant in Germany where new laser welding and hot metal forming produces a 20% stronger body for improved refinement and safety.

Sitting on the company's new C2 platform it will be launched in five-door hatchback and estate styles with carry over or sharper prices for its seven trim levels.

Prices start at £17,930 for the Focus Style - £2,300 below the model it replaces. Focus Zetec and ST-Line - together representing 55 per cent of sales - are now £850 and £250 less respectively. Zetec versions are from £19,300, ST-Line £21,570 and ST-Line X £24,050, Titanium £21,550, Titanium X £22,820 and topping the new range is the Vignale from

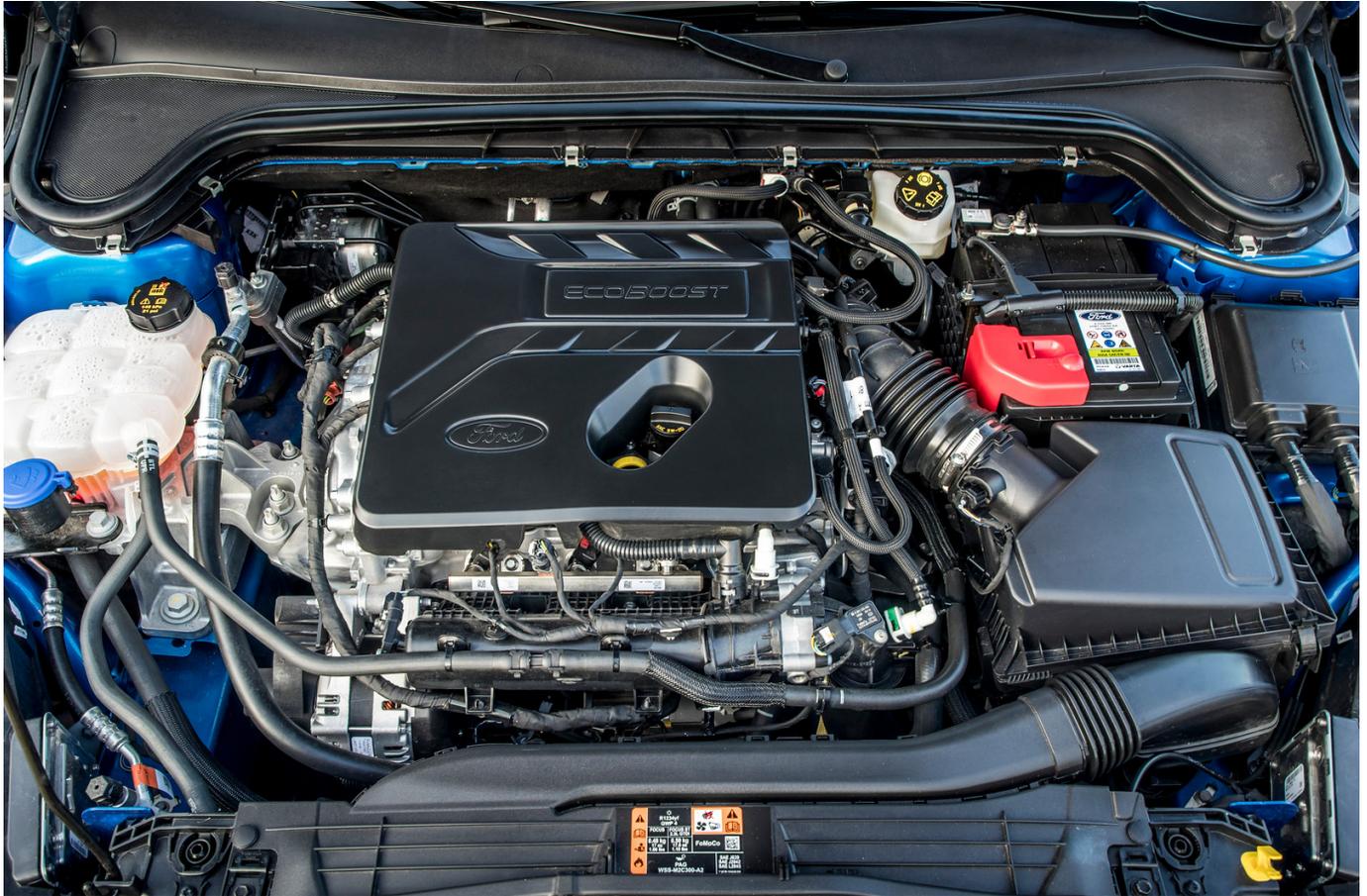


£25,450.

It's about the same size as the outgoing versions, and has a longer wheelbase, with rear seat passengers in particular gaining knee and shoulder room, while the driver and front passenger have greater width with a narrower console as more functions move to the touchscreen on the fascia.

Estate versions now hold up to 1.650 litres (58.27 cu.ft) and have a longer floor than currently and more headspace.

Powertrain choices include a further optimised version of Ford's multi-award-winning 1.0 litre EcoBoost petrol units in 85, 100 and 125 hp outputs and new 1.5-litre EcoBoost petrol engine delivering 150 or 182 hp, enhanced with Ford's industry-first cylinder deactivation application for three-cylinder engines. All comply with the forthcoming WLTP economy regulations and lowest emissions for the smaller engine are 107 g/km while the larger unit now has a reduction down to 122 g/km.



New 95 or 120 hp 1.5 litre EcoBlue diesels emit 91 g/km and 150 hp 2.0 litre EcoBlue diesel delivers ultimate fuel-efficiency with 112 g/km. All have been engineered for use in hybrid electric models in the near future.

Six-speed manual gearboxes are standard but a new intelligent eight-speed automatic transmission adapts shift patterns to driving style, and is controlled using an ergonomic Rotary Gear Shift Dial.

The Focus also sees the latest Ford technology incorporated. Continuously Controlled Damping technology for the independent front and rear suspension systems can instantly adjust for potholes; there are new Drive Modes; an isolated rear subframe for greater refinement and Ford-patented spring technology.



Driver and passengers have comfort and convenience features including FordPass Connect embedded modem for connectivity on the move and a new Wireless charging pad for compatible smartphone devices. Also available is adaptive cruise control, lighting, automatic parking, head-up display and emergency steering assistance. Parents can even control a young person driving the car with a dedicated key to limit speed, music and other features without affecting their safety at any time.

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Focus Style comes as standard with 16-inch alloy wheels, air conditioning, DAB digital radio with Bluetooth and Emergency Assist, electronic parking brake, autonomous emergency braking, tyre pressure monitoring, Hill Start Assist and Lane-Keeping Aid.

Zetec models add highlights such as Ford's acclaimed SYNC3 DAB Radio with a 6.5-inch touchscreen and Apple CarPlay/Android Auto functionality, cruise control with speed limiter, front fog lights and QuickClear heated windscreen.

Titanium models bring additional comfort and convenience features including front and rear parking sensors, heated front seats, dual-zone climate control, keyless entry and start, a larger eight-inch colour touchscreen, satellite navigation and FordPass Connect wireless connectivity.

The Titanium X boosts the luxury further with partial leather trim, a power-adjustable driver's seat, privacy glass and 17-inch alloy wheels.

For sporty drivers, the ST-Line offers unique body styling, including unique upper and lower grille, rear spoiler and polished twin tailpipes. Inside are a flat-bottomed steering wheel, black headlining, aluminium gearknob, alloy finish pedals and red stitching.

The ST-Line X adds 18-inch alloy wheels, red brake calipers and many of the luxury features found on the Titanium X model.



At the top of the all-new Focus range sits the Vignale, joining the upscale Ford range that already includes Mondeo, S-MAX, Kuga, Edge and Fiesta Vignale models.

Featuring a unique front grille and body styling with 18-inch wheels, the Focus Vignale is distinguished by full LED lighting front and rear. Inside, the Focus Vignale gets leather upholstery, head-up display, rear view camera, heated steering wheel and the 675-watt 10-speaker B&O Play Premium Audio System. The Focus Vignale will also be available in an exclusive Dark Mulberry body colour. The acclaimed B&O Play audio system is available as a £350 option on Titanium, Titanium X and ST-Line X models.

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First impressions:

Time moves on and two decades after it redefined the dynamics of what we accepted in a family car, the latest generation Ford Focus brings a new level of sophistication to the sector.

Whether you go for the ultra economical new low emission diesel, the thrifty 1.0 triple or the all-round practical 1.5 EcoBoost petrol units you'll not be disappointed. Each has its merits.

Whichever is chosen for a road test they ooze comfort and composure from the seats, suspension and high end equipment, to the driver's delight with steering, gearchange, power delivery, brakes, handling, controls and instruments.

New Focus also gets the company's latest eight-speed automatic transmission option with selectable settings to suit style and conditions as well as paddle levers and a manual mode. It is one of the best automatics on the market for smoothness, responses and ability.

A standard six-speed manual gearbox is fitted across the range and it's a light and direct unit as well which makes the most of the available power from the engines.



Over very demanding steep roads through the foothills behind Nice this week at the international media launch every engine distinguished itself even if they did not return the typical fuel economy you'd expect on less inclined roads. Even so the petrol 125 hp 1.0 returned 41 mpg, the 182 hp 1.5 about 24 mpg and the 150 hp 2.0 diesel auto between 22 and 35 mpg. Cylinder deactivation and restart was imperceptible.

Probably the most surprising of the trio-tested was the beefy diesel automatic with its wide power band and snappy responses to throttle, seamless gearchanges or eagerness to perform through the paddles, particularly in the full manual mode. This could be the dark stallion in Ford's Focus stable and this transmission may rise above the 15% anticipated orders.

From launch the hatchback and estate models will be available with the most popular engines while the Active will come later this year with the automatic transmission as well.

VERDICT

Competent - and representing huge steps forward in many areas over previous Focus generations.

For: Excellent powertrain, very smooth and quiet, comfortable and roomy seats, well equipped, good ride and sharp handling with a high level of grip, some lower prices.

Against: Some road rumbles from tyres and bump-thump from suspension; interior highlights contrast with dark plastic-lined interior panels; potential for distraction with so many functions/controls done via the touchscreen, ungenerous warranty.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Ford Focus ST-Line X 5-door hatchback 182 hp, 1.5 EcoBoost petrol, manual.

Price: £25,055.

Mechanical: 182 PS three cylinder 1.5 turbo-petrol, six speed manual.

Performance: 138 mph, 0-62 mph 8.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle on test 27.8 mpg.



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Emissions and taxation: CO2 126 g/km, VED road tax £160 First Year rate then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 26%.

Insurance Group: 21 tbc.

Warranty: Three years/ 60,000 miles.

Sizes: L 4.38 m (14.37 ft), W 1.98 m (6.50 ft), H 1.48 m (4.86 ft). Bootspace: 375-1,354 litres (13.24-47.82 cu.ft).