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2018 Ford EcoSport compact SUV – Road Test

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Ford's latest EcoSport compact SUV = better but not best.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) gives his assessment...

The latest Ford EcoSport compact SUV is the best yet after a troubled start in 2014. Under Ford's then current 'One Ford' global vehicle policy, to meet the demand for SUVs, which started in 2010 and has grown rampantly since then, Ford brought their Brazilian designed chunky looking EcoSport to the UK and Europe in 2014.

Poor European sales due to unrefined handling, skimpy interior space and poor build quality resulted in revisions in 2015 for the second generation Fiesta based model built in India,



and over 150,000 of them have been sold in Europe. That is still not enough to trouble the class leaders such as the Nissan Juke, Peugeot 2008, Renault Captur and Fiat 500X – and it now has to compete against newer rivals such as the Hyundai Kona, Kia Stonic, Vauxhall Mokka/Crossland X, Skoda Karoq and SEAT Arona. The EcoSport joins Ford's other SUVs, the mid-sized Kuga and the larger Edge and there are reports that this line-up will be extended with an even smaller Crossover/SUV model at the end of this year, still based on the Fiesta.

For the 2018 model year EcoSport Ford has transferred production to Romania to meet the expected growth in sales from European markets. It is still based on the Fiesta platform but Ford claim over 2,300 changed components are included in the latest versions.





Styling wise the latest EcoSport looks far more polished and attractive and the larger front grille, reminiscent of that used for the Kuga and Edge models, gives it a purposeful face. There is the usual rising waistline but at the rear is still its old fashioned side hinged rear tailgate giving access to a relatively small boot space of 356 litres (12.57 cu.ft). This capacity grows up to 1,238 litres (43.72 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded, but it's by no means class-leading. The original models were criticised for using this side hinged tailgate door because it was heavy with the spare wheel attached to its outside and opening it wide enough to load bags could be difficult if other cars were parked close behind it. The solution about weight has been to get rid of the spare wheel, now you only get an inflation kit, but there is the option of a spare wheel for the base Zetec spec because the Titanium and ST-Line versions have a rear view camera so a wheel cannot be fitted to the door and there isn't space under the load floor.

The latest EcoSport also still comes up short for interior space compared to most of the competition in this sector. The body length is 4,096 mm (13.44 ft), almost the same as the latest Fiesta supermini five door hatch, so it's cosy inside especially for rear seat passengers. It is only 1,765 mm (5.79 ft) wide so shoulder room is tight and with its tall height of 1,653 mm (5.42 ft) there is plenty of headroom but given its limited width, from the outside it looks top heavy. With the elevated ride height and narrow width this causes body roll during cornering due to the high centre of gravity.

Certainly the revised suspension and steering settings have improved the handling of this latest model over previous versions but it's difficult to comprehend that many of the components and platform come from the best-handling supermini on sale today, the agile Ford Fiesta.

Where there has been a greater improvement thanks to Fiesta is the interior layout, especially the dashboard and controls, and the overall improvement in the quality of the materials used and their fitment. Personalisation options and connectivity functions are the latest improvements with Ford's new generation Sync 3 connectivity system, a floating central touchscreen up to 8.0-inches, cruise control with adjustable speed limiter and rear



view camera all being added to the vehicle, depending on the grade chosen.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The spec levels are Zetec, Titanium and the new sporty ST-Line addition. To be added to the range this year will be a new 1.5-litre EcoBlue turbodiesel engine with 125 hp which is combined with all wheel drive, the first time 4WD has been available in the EcoSport line-up. Prices start at £17,495 for a Zetec spec model, from £19,495 for the Titanium models and from £20,295 for the new ST-Line versions.

The Zetec spec level includes 16-inch alloy wheels, Quickclear heated windscreen, air-con, Sync 3 with a 6.5-inch touchscreen, electric front and rear windows, Apple CarPlay Android Auto and DAB radio. Titanium models have 17-inch alloys, climate control, auto lights and wipers, rear view camera, rear parking sensors, keyless start and 8.0-inch touchscreen with sat-nav. The new ST-Line gains sports suspension, sports body kit with rear roof spoiler and sports interior trim inserts and pedals.

Currently the 2018 model year engine choices are the best-selling 1.0 litre, three-cylinder 125 hp EcoBoost turbo petrol unit, the same sized unit with 140 hp for the ST-Line version and the sluggish 1.5 TDCi 100 hp turbodiesel engine, but with the new 125 hp turbodiesel with 4WD unit to come.



My test EcoSport version was the current best-selling Titanium 1.0 Ecoboost 125 hp, six-speed manual model with front wheel drive, priced at £19,495. However it came with personalisation options such as the £725 Ruby Red exterior paintwork, 18-inch alloys at £400, Blind Spot Information System at £350, front parking sensors at £125, CD player at £125 and the Titanium Lux Pack consisting of Ebony leather seat upholstery, HID headlights and heated front seats at £800 making a total of £22,020.

The 1.0 litre, three-cylinder turbo petrol EcoBoost engine we know well from other models



in Ford's range and it's always enjoyable with its throaty engine tone and responsive performance. Its party-piece is producing 170 Nm (125 lb.ft) of torque from 1,400 rpm so it's responsive for acceleration, smooth at low speeds and with enough power to cruise at higher speeds. Top speed is 111 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 12.7 seconds. It officially, in this model, will return 54.3 mpg in the Combined Cycle with CO2 emissions of 119 g/km so VED road tax is £160 First Year rate reducing to £140 Standard rate.



However in real-life motoring conditions fitted into the heavier 1,280 kg (2,822 lb) EcoSport the engine never really sparkled for acceleration, it felt flat and going up steep hills required changing to a lower gear to keep up momentum. The real life fuel economy varied considerably during my week of motoring. For much of the time driving locally it showed



around 45 mpg on the computer but a 100 mile motorway journey heading into the 'Beast from the East' strong wind knocked 10 mpg off that figure. Returning home with the wind behind the vehicle it got back up to 42 mpg. So as usual with these three-pot engines if you work them hard the fuel economy goes away sharply. Where the EcoBoost engine – with its torque availability from low rpm – did excel was when the snow came. There I was wondering how many people who had bought a new compact SUV with price-saving 2WD were sat looking at the weather, or at worst stuck in the snow, thinking I should have spent more and got a 4WD version.

The EcoSport with 2WD manfully performed really well with me adopting the low revs high gear philosophy of motoring in snow. It coped brilliantly and it was comparatively easy to potter along at 1,000 rpm in second or third gear through the snow with the front wheels not spinning and providing secure traction. Of course it will not get the vehicle out of very deep snow or mud; we have to wait for the arrival of the new 4WD EcoSport for that.

VERDICT

In short the new 2018 Ford EcoSport compact SUV is better but the market sector has moved on and it's not the best of its type.

For: Improved looks, much better well-equipped higher quality interior, latest connectivity functions, affordable price, flexible engine response at low rpm, 4WD model to come.

Against: Lacks interior width, restricted rear passenger legroom, small boot, side hinged load area door difficult to use at times, no spare wheel option, ungenerous warranty.



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

2018 Ford EcoSport 1.0 EcoBoost, 6-speed manual, Titanium, compact SUV.

Price: £19,495 (£22,020 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol, 125



hp, 170 Nm (125 lb.ft) of torque from 1,400 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 111 mph, 0-62 mph: 12.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 54.3 mpg (42 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 22%.

Insurance Group: 11E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,096 mm (13.44 ft) W 1,765 mm (5.79 ft), H 1,653mm, boot/load space 356 to 1,238 litres (12.57 to 43.72 cu.ft), braked towing weight 900 kg (1,984 lb), five doors, four to five seats.