Cupra Formentor – Road Test

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The Cupra Formentor V2 e-Hybrid 204 PS SUV…

…Tried and tested by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The head-turning Cupra Formentor e-Hybrid is a genuinely new model in the booming family SUV sector where its stablemate SEAT brand has done so well.

Formentor is the first model designed and developed exclusively for the Spanish Cupra sports brand and this spring picked up the highly valued five-star safety award from Europe's toughest crash testers.

The standalone Cupra brand was formally launched with the Formentor last December as the prestigious performance range from SEAT and it's gone from strength to strength. Previously the Cupra name was given to high performance models within the SEAT range.

The latest e-Hybrids arrived in the Spring to join the initial five-engined, highly specified five trim levels sharing a common five-door SUV body.

The Plug-in e-Hybrid models come with a choice of 204 or 245 PS 1.4 litre petrol engines and electric motors and are good for a pure battery range of 36 miles while charging from empty to full in 3.5 hrs, backed up by a petrol range over 235 miles.

The powertrain is a highly sophisticated system blending electric and petrol power,

switching as necessary to maximise economy or power while keeping down emissions. The front wheels are driven in the e-Hybrid models but the pure petrol versions come with front or all-wheel-drive.

Acceleration is very good from rest and it can easily keep up with or more likely ahead of other traffic with a lot in reserve for swift and safe overtaking, seamlessly delivered through the quiet and smooth six-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission.

The refinement continues with the well-weighted, quick turning steering and the immensely powerful large disc brakes, although I'm not a great fan of electric parking brakes with their lack of progressive take up but which seemed particularly sharp on the test car.

Cupra engineers have done a fine job with the fully independent coil sprung suspension on each corner. It really soaks up the worst bumps but also manages to give excellent body and chassis control more akin to a sports car than a big family hatchback. I can see the Formentor becoming the Q-car for enthusiasts who want to enjoy a journey and not just arrive at a destination.

When they do, they will be very refreshed and unstressed thanks to the Formentor's excellent front seats and reasonably comfortable back seats. Our V2 leather trim had powered adjustments and wrap-around padding with excellent support for a long trip.

There was no shortage of room infront or behind and three could easily sit abreast in the back with plenty of head and legroom.

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Access was very good for everyone, the loadbed was a sensible height although the minimal capacity was not brilliant for a big family's away days.

Inside the oddments provision was very good with pockets, bins and cubbies, a large glovebox and shallow trays.

For the driver everything came to hand and foot without stretching, worked well and the really large infotainment screen was very clear, even if the menus were not particularly fast changing. The essential dials infront of the driver were reasonably sized and very clear but also a bit cluttered and might benefit from enlarging in a facelift.

Air conditioning was immensely powerful, with a wide temperature range and really good directional ability, backed up by powered windows.

Visibility was excellent to front and sides but over the shoulder and when reversing the high flanks, thick c-pillars and tall tail restricted what could be seen, and you had to rely on the safety-belt of sensors and a very clear camera.

Wipers, washers and headlights all did a good job in poor visibility conditions.

With such a refined powertrain and sleek design you would expect the noise levels to be low and they were unless you pushed the petrol engine hard during acceleration.

Road noise was very modest unless a bad pothole made the suspension twitch. The smoothness of the suspension in action was underlined with a firmness due to the large wheels and tyres which picked up most irregularities.

VERDICT

In an age when performance hatchbacks seem to be falling out of fashion, the Cupra Formentor e-Hybrid has brought them back with a modern twist and a SUV/car which provides comfortable, enjoyable family motoring as well as head-turning looks.

For: Stylish sports look inside and out, useful performance, good dynamics, smooth powertrain, excellent seats, very comfortable.

Against: Poor rear visibility, modest nominal boot capacity, engine noise when pressed hard, fiddly infotainment system, ungenerous warranty.

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

Cupra Formentor V2 e-Hybrid 204 PS.

Price: £38,115

Mechanical: 204 PS, 4-cylinder, 1.4L, petrol-electric, 6-speed auto, 2WD

Performance: 127 mph, 0 – 62 mph 7.8 seconds

Official WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy: 235.4 mpg using the plug-in function

CO2 emissions: 29 g/km

Tax costs: BiK company car tax rating 11%, VED road tax £0 First Year then £145 Standard rate

Insurance Group: 24P

Warranty: 3-years/ 60,000-miles

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.45 m (14.60 ft), W 1.84 m (6.04 ft), H 1.51 m (4.95 ft), boot space 345 litres (12.18 cu.ft), kerbweight: 1,681 kg (3,706 lb), 5-doors/5-seats