Ford Fiesta ST-3 – Road Test

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The latest Ford Fiesta ST-3, 3-door hot-hatch given an outing.

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

More than any other car in modern times, the Ford Fiesta has defined British motoring and the high performance ST-series is the most desirable, particularly among motorsport fans.

Consistently one of the top selling cars in the UK market, the Fiesta is the right size for thousands of buyers looking for three or five door jack-of-all-trades transport. It has appeared in the top ten list every year since 1977 and has been the best seller more than

any other model over five decades and particularly since 2009.

Naturally it was a vehicle for Ford's presence in motor sport and rallying in particular, spawning the ST series and now that comes with a common high performance engine in three trim levels.



Our top line ST-3, 1.5 litre, three cylinder turbo-petrol 200 hp model was fitted with big 18-inch five-spoke alloy wheels, red calipers, limited slip differential, distinctive grille and body kit, LED lamps, sophisticated driver assistance aids, premium sound system, privacy glass, sports seats and leather trim as well as heated seats and wheel.



The test car had £2,295 of options including Ford Performance Blue paint; electric sunroof and driver assistance pack which included autonomous emergency braking, blind spot warning and rear view camera. It weighed in at £24,195.

At the top of the range is the ST-3 and the three-door version is the defining model for many buyers who respect its motor sporting achievements over four decades. Another £450 buys you the five-door version.

You have to compromise on accessibility to wriggle into the back seats and while the headroom is good, the space for legs is not great and the vision is restricted. The single side doors do look better to my eyes than the pair in the five door derivatives, but that's a matter of opinion outweighing practicality.

Inside, the oddments room is very good with seat back pockets for those behind and infront you have door bins, console box and trays as well as a reasonable glovebox. Behind, the boot has good access and is of a sensible shape and capacity, easily tripling in volume when the offset split back seats are dropped, although they don't fold completely flat.





Driver and front seat passenger have very easy access and superbly comfortable, figure hugging leather covered seats with good adjustment range and a lot of leg, shoulder and headroom, while the steering column has a wide adjustment range to help achieve any desired driving position.

The seats are nicely shaped and cushioned to hold and comfort occupants which is just as well because the ride is generally firm but sometimes bad surfaces hammer through the sporting-set suspension and shock absorbers. Most of the time it’s a very compliant and absorbing ride, with an occasional harshness upsetting progress.

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The stiff ride comes with agile, pin-sharp handling with its LSD and very good roadholding and manners so the driver always feels in control, helped by the feedback through the steering and very powerful, precise and informing brakes underfoot. There are three driving modes and a launch control setting for the ultimate getaway.



The three-cylinder 1.5 litre engine is impressive with 290 Nm (214 lb.ft) of pulling power and a neat close ratio six-speed manual gearbox to make the most of its 200 hp output, making it spritely to sixty and very relaxed at motorway speed.



What surprised me most was the fuel economy, never showing below 38 mpg and even some way over the WLTP figure at times, so it can be an economical as well as exciting car.

The ST-3 specification is very good but I was surprised by the lack of any front parking sensors at this price and without the driver assistance pack there would not be any at the rear or a camera. That is one useful feature that Ford could include in the next facelift.

The Fiesta ST-3 looks very good and goes very well, with clear sightlines to front and sides, more compromising when pulling out from an angled junction.



The noise levels are modest from engine, road and wind.

Lights are wide and long beamed at night, the wipers front and back are efficient and the air conditioning with heated front screen gives rapid and constant clear vision.

VERDICT

Add to all the foregoing the heated front seats and the warming steering wheel and you have a car for all seasons and possibly all reasons, which probably explains why it is such a

good allrounder for so many buyers. It is certainly the benchmark for this sporting hatchback sector.

For: Performance and handling, steering, brakes, economy, refinement, front sports seats, equipment, big sunroof, oddments space.

Against: Rear seat access and legroom, occasionally bumpy ride on bad roads, no front parking sensors, some visibility issues, ungenerous warranty.



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

Ford Fiesta ST-3, three door hatchback.



Price: £24,195 as tested.

Mechanical: 200 hp, 3-cylinder, 1,497cc turbo petrol engine, 6-speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 144 mph, 0 – 62 mph 6.5 seconds, Combined MPG: 40.4, CO2 158 g/km.

Tax costs: VED First Year road tax £540, £150 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 34%.

Insurance Group: 28.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.07 m (13.35 ft), W 1.74 m (5.71 ft), H 1.47 m (4.82 ft), boot space: 292 to 1,093 litres (10.31 to 38.60 cu.ft), three doors/four seats.