Ford Focus ST – Road Test

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The latest Ford Focus ST 5 door manual hot family hatchback…

…test driven by Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Like every other manufacturer, Ford is struggling to fulfill orders in the current climate of confusion and shortage of components but it’s worth waiting to get your hands on the latest Focus ST.

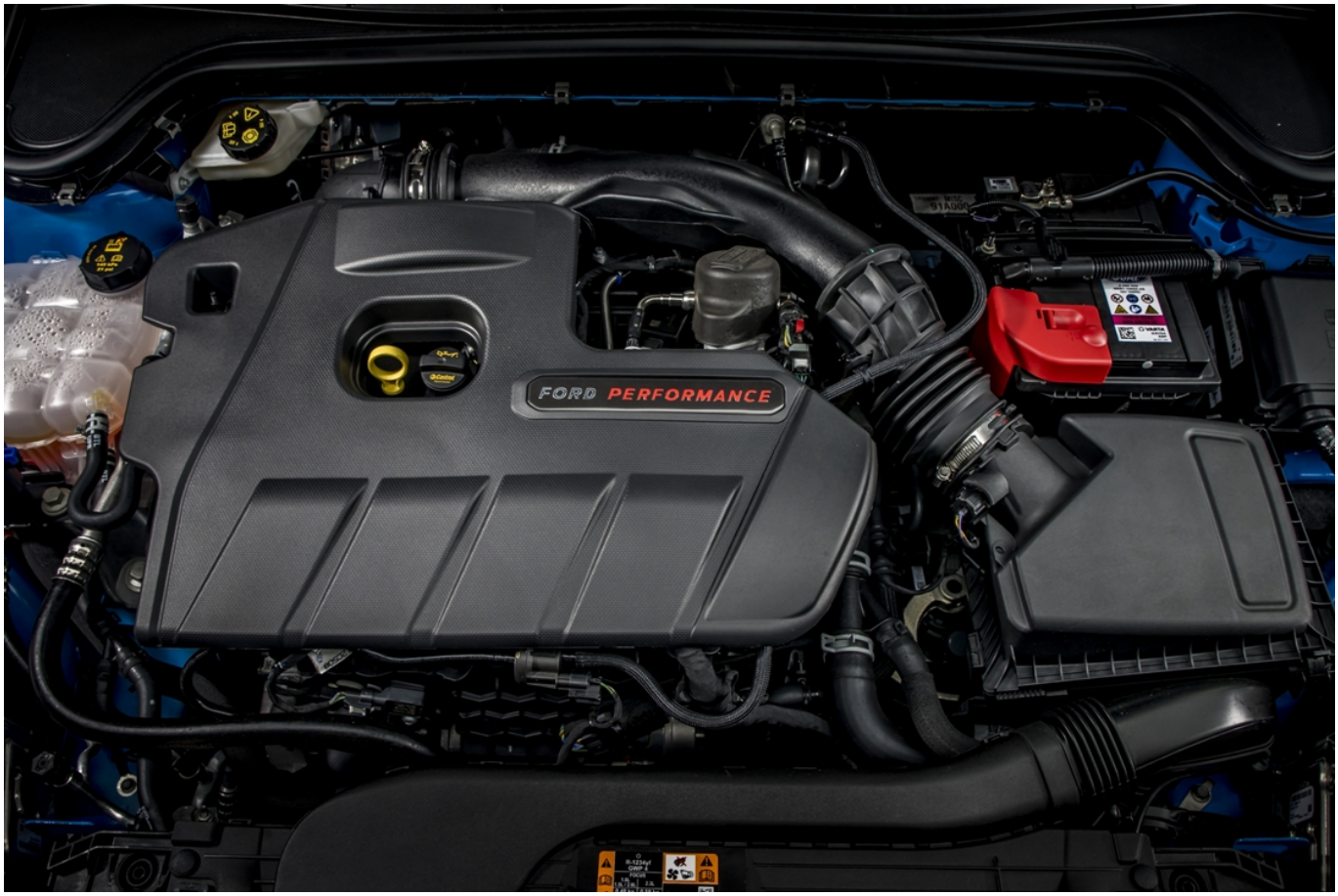
The market is changing for petrol-heads but the Focus ST still remains very desirable, particularly in the six-speed manual specification we tried as opposed the seven-speed automatic option.

Our £37,735 test car was fitted with £2,775 of extras comprising special body colour, Performance Pack of additional Track Mode and selectable Continuously Controlled Damping, driver assistance pack with intelligent cruise control, Head-up display and Active Park Assist with rear wide view camera.

Fast Fords have been with us for decades, are the halo models of its range and now they get the latest technology inside to match with a familiar but facelifted look outside.



Under the bonnet, which no longer carries the Ford oval which has moved to the middle of the grille, is the familiar very gutsy but surprisingly smooth EcoBoost 2.3 litre turbo-petrol engine pushing out over 270 bhp. It is an excellent power unit which can rival a straight six for smoothness but comes with sharper responses, although for now it has no hybrid elements.



Power delivery is instant, strong and progressive and the manual transmission is perfect with slick narrow gate, short throw movements and truly well matched ratios for sporting drivers. Ok, if the gears were longer or the new electronically controlled limited-slip diff had different ratios it would do better on fuel economy, but I do wonder who buys the Focus ST to save fuel over the snappy performance underfoot.

The brake servo now comes with an electric pump to overcome fading on long descents or when pressing for a good track time in the appropriate mode.

There are four modes selectable through a wheel mounted button, for slippery, normal, sport or track and combined with the advanced brakes and adjustable continuously controlled damping system you can really set it up to suit yourself and prevailing conditions.

Whichever mode is selected, the brakes are really up to task, giving excellent feel, immense stopping ability and never showed sign of fading.

Suspension can move from soft to sporty and skin of your teeth very easily but it was never uncomfortable even in the firmest mode.

The handling was failsafe too. With sharper steering selected it was dart-like in precision and wound back a bit for normal use it was effortless and not at all twitchy.

Grip was very good and because of the sophisticated electronic diff and wheel-monitored anti-slip. You could think it was all-wheel-drive rather than front wheel drive, although it might not be as practical on a very snowy road where ground clearance is reduced by a centimeter in the ST chassis.


XMI T8O



Secondary controls are the familiar spoke buttons with the addition of the performance mode and at first look cluttered but were really convenient to use. Less easy to use were the touch screen buttons packed into the 13.2-inch touchscreen in the dash centre which required more than a glance from the road to find and select.Ford’s designers have also packed the climate control buttons into the touchscreen and again you have to fiddle to find what you want.

Those are in addition to the car settings, phone and infotainment for map and sound systems which integrate with a linked mobile phone and the company’s SYNC system.

The big screen also holds the mode display push buttons activated by the master switch on the wheelspoke.



Altogether, the big screen looks good, but is not good to use in practice with so much going on inside. Just a few separate buttons below operate the ESC, front screen heater, skid control and self-parking functions along with the volume rotary.

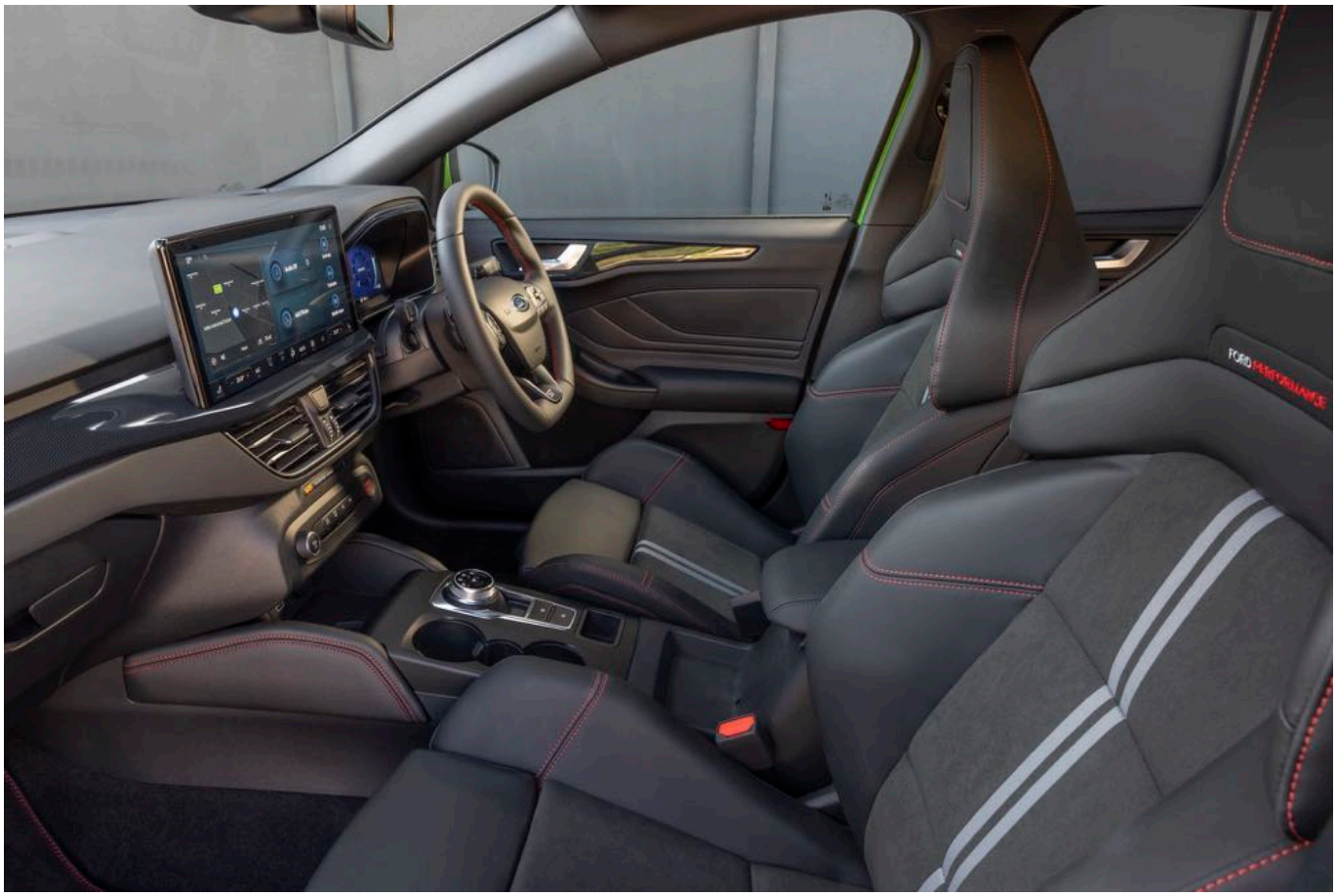
The driver instruments' displays are really just speedo and tachometer but their appearance changes along with a steady showing for engine temperature and fuel level. They are very clear although not overly large.

When you find and select the heating and ventilation controls the system does work very well throughout the cabin and it's backed up by four electric windows together with front and rear heated screens.

Outstandingly good wide and long range headlights are up to the car's performance and the front and rear washers and wipers clear the glass almost entirely. Mirrors are big and give good vision to the back.

The Ford Focus ST is a roomy five-seater family sized hatchback and those in front have under-knee support if wanted while the seats themselves are deeply shaped and comfortable

around backs and thighs. Adjustment is electric and range is very good too.



Rear seats are less well shaped but still comfortable and there is a ski-hatch and drinks holder built in if used four-up. Simple release levers drop down the offset back rests to more than triple capacity on the flat wide and long boot floor. Access was good to that as well as the cabin.





The Focus ST is generally quiet, but start tickling the throttle or fine tune the responses and it comes over loud and clear with a rorty response and smile inducing snap, crackle and pop from the exhaust. Yes, the perfect start to a Saturday morning brunch.



VERDICT

If you loved the original Focus ST you'll have grown up since and the newest version is more mature but still a fantastic and fun filled experience, if not as much value for money as its predecessors.

For: Exhilarating performance, taut handling, good adjustable ride, roomy, excellent infotainment and instruments display.

Against: Oppressive black interior trim, modest economy, expensive options and BIK tax costs, average warranty.

FAST FACTS

Ford Focus ST



Price: £37,735 with options

Mechanical: EcoBoost 270 bhp 4 cyl 2.3 litre turbo-petrol, 6 speed manual

Max Speed: 155 mph

0 – 62mph: 5.7 sec

Combined MPG: 33

Insurance Group: 34

C02 emissions: 183 g/km

Bik rating: 37%, £945FY, £165SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.40 m (14.44 ft), W 1.83 m (6.00 ft), H 1.46 m (4.79 ft)

Bootspace: 358 to 1320 litres (12.64 to 46.62 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,512 kg (3,333 lb)