Ford Kuga PHEV – Road Test, and Halewood plant news

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Author: Robin Roberts

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THE FORD KUGA PHEV PLUGGED-IN AND TESTED BY ROBIN

ROBERTS, PLUS BREAKING NEWS ABOUT FORD'S HALEWOOD PLANS, FROM MILES BETTER NEWS AGENCY…

Our road test this week is very topical as today – 18 October 2020 Ford has announced it is to invest hundreds of millions of pounds in its Halewood plant on Merseyside UK to produce components for electric cars. The investment will help safeguard 500 jobs.

The factory will be Ford's first European plant to produce components for electric cars. Up to £230m will be invested in the plant with an undisclosed portion coming from the UK Government's Automotive Transformation Fund.

Ford has said that their entire passenger car range in Europe will be electrified by 2030 but the Halewood plant will begin manufacturing components and complete electric power units to replace petrol engines by 2024.

Although Ford has hybrid versions of many of its models they have been a bit slow pushing into the plug-in and full electric sectors. But according to our road tester Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency), who has been behind the wheel of the latest Ford Kuga PHEV plug-in hybrid, it been worth the wait.

The highly popular SUV behind the blue-oval badge has been well designed and developed for today’s buyers of family cars who want to have as few compromises as possible but also need a good range of models to chose from including hybrids of various types.

The recent petrol fuel shortages meant the car's reasonable electric only range around 30 miles would get many routine journeys covered before recharging but the reality was you could eek out more when the petrol engine was used alongside the electric motor. With our Kuga PHEV plug-in petrol electric hybrid we saw over 74 miles per gallon at best and just under 50 mpg at worst. The Kuga PHEV uses plug-in mains electric charging, regenerative braking and some charging function during normal driving so there is no driving range anxiety.

The test car's list price was a little over £38,000 but it was fitted with £2,800 of options including mini-spare wheel, inductive phone charging, advanced headlights and heads up

display, driving assistance pack, and a detachable tow bar with electric kit. It therefore was placed outside the HM Government's PHEV assistance grant, unless you can convince the Ford dealer to come down quite a bit to a lower OTR price.

The familiar 2.5 litre EcoBoost petrol engine pushes out 225 PS from four cylinders and is surprisingly smooth if not as quiet as a six-cylinder unit might be, particularly when pressed with a lot of passengers aboard, but its tuning is intended to make the most of mid-range punch. Performance is respectable, not rapid and the fully automatic CVT box takes a toll but repays with really smooth progressive action whether accelerating or slowing.

You'll not be disappointed by the nicely balanced steering with a good turning circle and acceptable feedback and the footbrake is delightfully progressive and strong.

Secondary controls around the column, on the wheel-spokes and close to hand on the fascia are also clearly marked and worked well while the essential dials in front of the driver were big and clear at all times and split by a multi-mode computer display including audio,

navigation, entertainment and driving data.

A larger central display showed the map and navigation settings, mobile phone, music and entertainment as required and buttons below covered the basic climate control options, fans and distribution. All were quick to use and worked well. A large sunroof and powered windows gave further options.

Oddments room was very good throughout with door recesses, big glovebox, central trays and console bin and a number of power points for all users front and back. The access to the rear floor was excellent with a remote blip to open and close the fifth door and the space was sensibly high and shaped with a dramatic increase possible if the rear seat-backs were dropped – but they did not fall completely flat.

Front and rear doors opened wide, access was good and once inside the room was good for six footers with adequate head and knee-room and it would just take three abreast in the rear. All the seats were very well shaped and comfortable with plentiful reach and rake movement on the front pair.

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The dual-zone climate control kept the interior at a desired temperature setting without any issues. Front and rear seats were heated as was the steering wheel on the test model.

Ford’s excellent quick-clear front window system is supported by a very good air conditioning system and rear window heating, massive effective wipers front and back and some of the brightest ‘intelligent’ LED headlights you will find on any car, which automatically dip and don’t dazzle oncoming traffic while lighting up the verges and bends and have a long range in the countryside.

The Kuga’s handling is failsafe and faithful but not as sharp as some might like and the fact it’s front wheel drive only and not all-wheel-drive will cost it some buyers who want better traction on wintry roads. It rides well over most roads but you can hear how hard it’s

working as noise suppression is not good.

The engine rumbling away is only really noticeable at higher engine speed while wind and other mechanical sources are very muted.

Practical tasks such as recharging are quickly accomplished with a nearside front wing point and Ford has sensibly included domestic as well as rapid charge cables which some rivals do not offer or want a lot of money for so it’s worth asking if considering another challenger.

VERDICT

The Ford Kuga ST-Line X Edition PHEV is mid-range but really a high quality choice and a sensible one if fuel supplies are going to be an issue going forward. It answers so many questions, it could be the answer to many prayers and no fingers crossed driving range anxieties.

For: Extremely comfortable, very roomy five door access, reasonable performance, excellent range, dual charging cables, precise navigation system, silky smooth automatic transmission, no driving range anxiety.

Against: Price and options push it above grant assistance level, road noise ever present, some engine noise when pressed, not all-wheel-drive as it's an SUV.

Wheels-Alive/Miles Better Fast facts:

Ford Kuga ST-Line X Edition PHEV

Mechanical: 225ps 4cyl 2488cc petrol-electric, CVT, front wheel drive

Price: £40,755

Max speed: 125 mph

0 – 62 mph: 9.2 secs

Combined mpg; 60

Emissions: 32 g/km

BIK: £Zero FY, £480 x5 SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Insurance group: 27E

Size: L 4.63 m (15.19 ft), W 1.89 m (6.20 ft), H 1.67 m (5.48 ft)

Boot space: 411 to 1481 litres (14.51 to 52.30 cu.ft)

Kerb weight: 1,844 kg (4,065 lb)