Ford Kuga ST-Line 2.5 FHEV FWD – Road Test

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Robin Roberts (and WheelsWithinWales) test drives Ford’s Kuga

SUV…

After its launch in 2008, the Ford Kuga has grown from the company's first 'tall' hatchback into one of their success stories among UK best sellers, and the story continues this year.

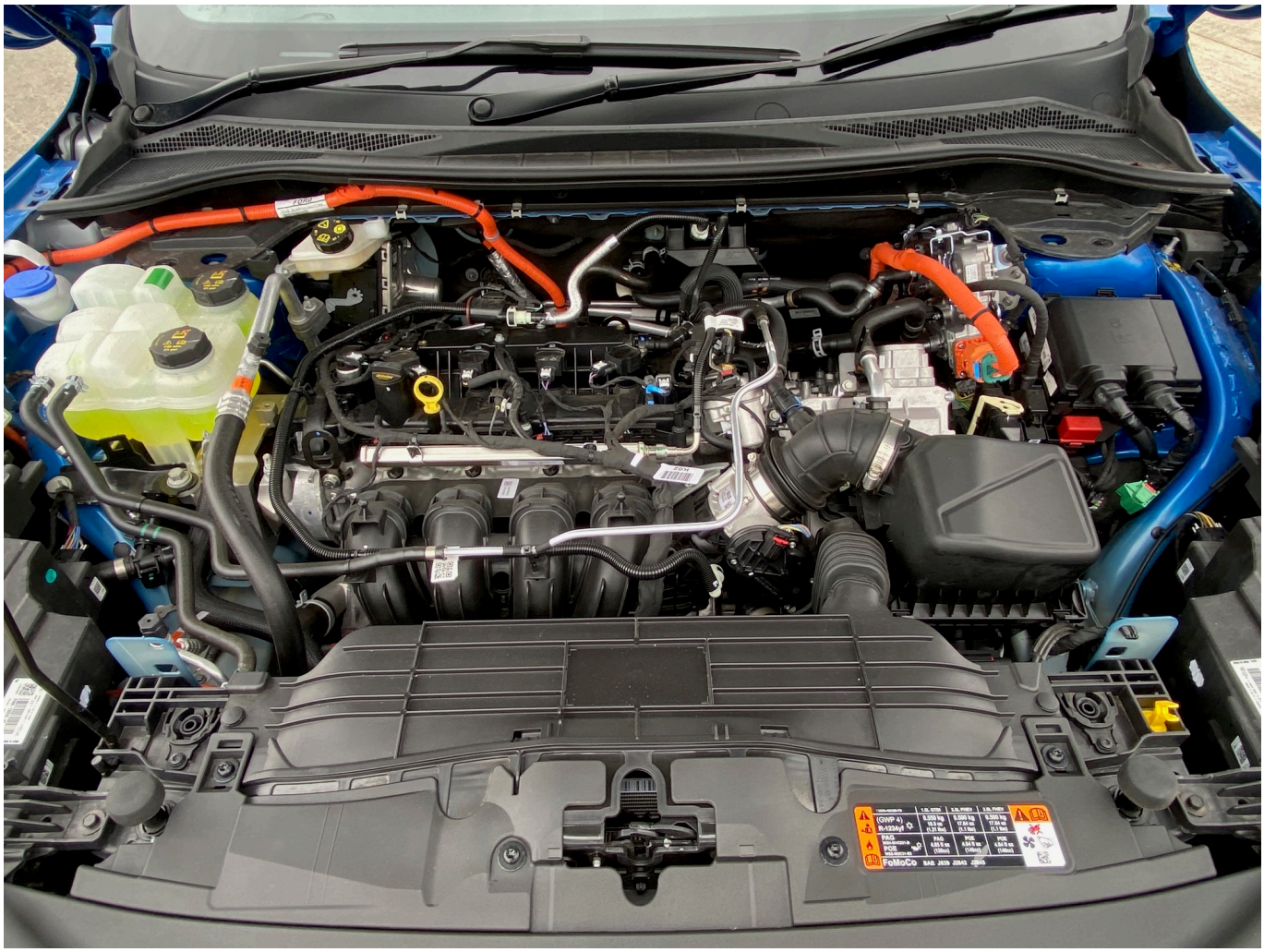
Now on sale with some very significant updates and improvements to its technology, equipment and design, the Ford Kuga is taking on rivals including many in the showrooms of more premium brands.



Diesel engines have been dropped while the plug-in hybrid has been joined by a reworked

mild-hybrid to meet the needs of particular buyers who would struggle to have a charging point at their home or office.

It’s a very wise move in the current charging climate and the bonus builds with the fact that the electric motor and controlling software is highly sophisticated and the seamless system holds the promise of good economy overall, as we found on our test of the 180 PS 2.5 litre Duratec FHEV with CVT box.



The 2024 range covers Titanium, Vignale, ST-Line, ST-Line X with Black and Graphite Editions from about £33,400 to £42,335, spread over 16 models.

Powertrains include pure petrol 150 PS 1.5 litre engines with six-speed gearboxes and 180 or 225 PS electric-petrol hybrid units with eight-speed continuously variable automatic transmissions. There are no diesels in the current range but you can get front or four-wheel drive depending on the engine chosen.

Kuga was launched in 2008 and there have been four generations of this world-wide model, one of Ford's best selling modern family cars as the business now concentrates on SUVs of various size and performance, including some pure EVs.

The 2.5 Duratec engine is a staple of the brand and its four-cylinder unit gives instant starting, pulls well and is smooth even at motorway speed, coping with the near 1.7 tonnes weight.

Aligned with the electric motor coming in only when needed there is reasonable acceleration and economy which always seemed to sit the right side of 50 mpg and was on hand to give a boost when needed for rapid overtaking.

The CVT box was smooth at take up and during driving, worked through a simple rotary switch for normal or low range work and near silent performance.

Steering felt very good and progressive with a tight turning circle, no kick-back and feel at speed while the brakes underfoot quickly dragged down speed and permitted a gentle stop when needed creeping along in traffic, with an intelligent parking brake to hand as well.

It felt very planted on the road with only a bit of body roll and even then it never gave cause for concern and any tendency to run wide was quickly tamed with the power or steering eased back.

The 18-inch, high profile tyres gave a generally smooth ride but sometimes the Sport suspension was caught out by deeper potholes, and coarse surfaces did produce a drumming sound. Other mechanical and wind noises were very low.

A driver will find it easy to locate and use the essential secondary controls grouped around the column, on the wheelspokes, central tray or under and in the infotainment system. The big central 13-inch touchscreen display was very clear, easy to use and quick responding. Some switches were grouped below this for ease of use.

Infront of the driver is a familiar 12.3-inch digital display for road speed and engine revolutions, incorporating fuel and charging states as well as essential fluid levels, and they were similarly straightforward and clear.

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Cabin temperature was easily set and maintained throughout, backed up by four powered windows, and it had an optional £550 Winter Pack comprising heated front seats and steering wheel.

Our test car also came with a £1,200 opening glass roof and £900 Technology Pack with intelligent LED Headlamps, front light bar and Head Up display for primary data in the driver’s eyeline. There was also an £850 retractable tow bar.

The optional high performance headlights really did a very good job illuminating some country roads without dazzling oncoming drivers and we appreciated the heated seats and wheel on a few chilly mornings before winter fully grips us.

A reversing camera and sensors were also appreciated as there is a sizeable blind spot behind the tall rear panel where people or posts might be lurking and the rear cross traffic alert will save some potential damage in car parks.

Going forward, adaptive cruise control will help keep a driver within speed limits and lane lines and there is also the bonus of pre-collision assistance and autonomous braking with evasive steering assistance to avoid some hazards. There’s no denying this is a very safety aware model coming with a number of airbags throughout the cabin.

Our ST-Line was fitted with 12-way powered front seats, deeply shaped and supportive with adjustable thigh support and sliding rear seats, which gradually increased luggage space behind the power assisted tailgate.

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The high riding seating, low waistline and deep windows gave good sightlines to front and sides, less so to the rear, but those brilliant lights, big front wipers and powerful washers were welcome on wet days. The rear wiper cleared only a small part of the back screen due to its reduced depth.

The cabin was easy to enter or leave with good headroom, shoulder space and comfortable clearance for three behind. Using the loadspace was also simple with below-waist flat wide floor, very quickly dropped rear-seatbacks and a retractable luggage cover.

Oddments room was reasonable throughout with door trays, console box and tray as well as good sized glovebox.

VERDICT

The Ford Kuga has matured into a very modern and well specified family car suitable for a number of roles where it will not disappoint even if some traditionalists baulk at the price being asked before they look at how expensive and less well equipped are rivals to this model.

For: Roomy & comfortable, good ride, sharp handling, very economical, feelsome major controls and smooth powertrain, fairly quiet.

Against: Average performance, expensive options push it into higher tax bracket, some cheap plastic finishes in rear.



Fast facts: Ford Kuga ST-Line FHEV

Price: £42,165

Mechanical: 180 PS 4 cyl 2.5 litre petrol-electric engine, automatic CVT, front wheel drive

Max speed: 122 mph

0 – 62 mph: 9.1sec

Fuel consumption: 52 mpg

Insurance group: 20

Emissions: 125 g/km

BIK: 30%, £220FY, £590SRx5

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Rating: 4/ 5

Size: L 4.62 m (15.16 ft), W 1.89 m (6.20 ft), H 1.66 m (5.45 ft)

Bootspace: 412 to 1,534 litres (14.55 to 54/17 cu.ft)

Kerb weight: 1,689 kg (3,724 lb)

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