Ford Puma – Road Test

Published: July 31, 2020

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/ford-puma-road-test/



ON THE PROWL FOR CROSSOVER SALES – FORD'S NEW PUMA.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) gives his verdict…

Ford revealed its new five door Crossover – also you could call it a compact SUV, towards the end of last year with UK deliveries scheduled to begin in January. However the COVID-19 lockdown derailed the early delivery to over 7,000 early adopter UK customers awaiting this new addition to the market place. Of these UK customers more than 90% have chosen the petrol/hybrid 48V mHEV models.

My initial test drive programme was a casualty of the lockdown with no cars available so it's

only now that my test car has arrived from Ford. It's the Puma 1.0 litre 48 Volt mHEV ST-Line X, five door, 155 hp with a six speed manual gearbox and like all Pumas front wheel drive. The price is £24,420, close to the top of the price range which starts at £21,640 and extends through 12 derivatives to £26,840. However my test car had numerous extra cost options which pushed the on-the-road price up to £29,370. Big ticket option items were the £900 Driver Assistance Pack which includes radar and other safety technologies plus a rear view camera and Active Park Assist, £950 for the opening panoramic glass sunroof, £800 for LED headlights, £600 for the handsfree power tailgate, £450 for the 19-inch matt black alloy wheels and £500 for a detachable towbar.





Now slightly older drivers will remember Ford used the Puma brand name back in the 1990s for their smart but impractical two door coupé which didn't sell well and accordingly had a short life. The new Puma hits the current sweet spot for new car sales, compact SUVs/Crossovers – term them how you will. I look on SUVs as being chunky, practical on/off roaders with an elevated ride height, sensible exterior body protection and with 2WD or 4WD or both. Crossovers I see as essentially family type hatchbacks with an elevated suspension to visually 'pimp' the ride height and with added body protection trim – fashion over function in other words. The Puma Crossover is slightly different as it offers more load capacity with its MegaBox added storage space beneath the boot floor, potentially making it

more of a function over fashion vehicle.

This five door Puma Crossover model is built in Romania and fits in Ford's range between the EcoSport rugged small SUV model and the newly introduced and larger Kuga SUV which I'm also about to road test in the next week or so. To bridge the sales gap between Hatchback and Crossover/SUVs Ford also has 'Active' elevated suspension versions of their main-selling Fiesta and Focus ranges as well.

The new Puma uses a stretched version of the Ford Fiesta supermini class platform and in the flesh it looks much chunkier and larger than the high selling family member. It is a similar treatment to that used by Fiat who expanded their 500 supermini range to include the 500X Crossover by stretching it in all directions and giving it a bolder chunkier elevated look.

Ford for the Puma, instead of adopting the usual 'wedge' roofline of an typical SUV, have a curved coupé look, like the Fiesta and Focus models, which doesn't seem to reduce the headroom to any great extent. The Puma's headlights and rear light clusters also protrude from the top edge of the wings, similar to the Nissan Juke's distinctive looks. At the front is a bolder version of the familiar Ford signature grille and at the rear of my higher spec test model a very attractive roof extension sports spoiler.

The Puma is 4,207 mm (13.80 ft) in length, 1,805 mm (5.92 ft) wide and 1,552 mm (5.09 ft) high with a wheelbase of 2,588 mm (8.49 ft). The boot space is variable depending on the layout ranging from 456 litres (16.10 ft) with the rear seats in use up to 1,161 litres (41.00 cu.ft) with the split rear seat backs folded down. But if the spare wheel is fitted as an option, then the minimum boot space becomes 401 litres (14.16 cu.ft). The spare wheel area is part of the MegaBox storage system which for good measure is lined to be waterproof with a drain hole in the bottom, ideal for wet wellies or liquid loads. With its fashionable Crossover/SUV styling, practical interior, added dimensions and new fuel efficient drivetrains, the Puma's arrival is well timed for many people in these financially difficult times. Perhaps the rear seat legroom could have been a bit more generous for family users.



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The Puma will compete with numerous other Crossover or compact SUVs such as the Nissan Juke, Suzuki S-Cross, Peugeot 2008, Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross, Fiat 500X, VW T-Roc, Skoda Kamiq, SEAT Arona and even the Audi A2 if you have brand envy or want to spend a bit more money. In practise of course its major competitor could be Ford's own Fiesta where customers who need just that bit more space and fashionable street-cred styling might be tempted by the new Puma.

The current Puma specification line-up is Titanium, ST-Line, ST-Line X and the just added the ST- Line X Vignale. In this report I'm not going into detail re what spec items you get with each spec level – its typical Ford fare, sensibly comprehensive for each grade with

reasonable trim quality. Each of the spec levels is available with Ford's award winning EcoBoost 1.0 litre turbo-petrol three cylinder engine but with notable changes for some versions, mainly the addition of the new 48-Volt mild-hybrid technology branded mHEV, by Ford. Cylinder deactivation is also included and a new seven speed auto gearbox option has just been included for the one non-hybrid engine option.

The current 1.0 litre engine line-up is hybrid 125 hp mHEV six speed manual, a 125 hp non-hybrid seven speed auto and hybrid mHEV 155 hp six speed manual. The CO2 emissions range from 127 g/km to 140 g/km with the non-hybrid automatic models having the highest figures. It is expected a 1.5 litre 120 hp diesel engine and a higher performance petrol unit for an ST model will join the range at some point.



By adopting the mild-hybrid addition for two versions of the same engine it doesn't contribute to any more horsepower but it does provide more torque. The belt driven 48V, 11.5 kW starter/generator motor hybrid system called BISG by Ford can provide up to 50 Nm (37 lb.ft) of extra torque for the 1.0 litre turbo engines. This hybrid system reduces the amount of work the engine has to do so the fuel efficiency improves by up to 9% and it also delivers 50% more torque at lower rpm. For the 155 hp petrol unit in my test drive Puma the torque figure is 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) from 2,500 rpm. Top speed is 124 mph with zero to 62 mph taking 8.9 seconds. The WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy figure for this unit with the ST-Line X spec model is 54.3 mpg and my week of test driving retuned 49.8 mpg. The CO2 emissions are a low 101 g/km so its tax friendly with VED First Year rate at £155 and Standard rate at £150. Company car drivers will pay 23% Benefit-in-Kind tax.



Using the BISG has allowed Ford to lower the compression ratio of their three cylinder engine and so use a larger turbocharger to reduce turbo-lag during acceleration. The BISG system also provides a faster restart time for the Start-Stop system and the restart after the engine coasting phase on the overrun plus it enables regenerative braking energy capture to put electric current back into the lithium-ion battery. In addition the BISG torque supply also allows for seamless cylinder deactivation when three cylinder operation become two cylinders for light-load driving and then back to three cylinders again in just 14 milliseconds. It's all clever stuff which really works and I can see why over 90% of UK customers so far have specified a hybrid version over the non-hybrid engine. It's just a shame that for now the mHEV hybrid system is only available for manual gearbox models.

Just by having that extra hybrid supplied torque from lower engine speeds really suits UK driving conditions, especially on rural winding and hilly routes. To further enhance the driving experience in a practical way the Puma has a Drive Modes function with Normal, Eco, Sport, Slippery and Trail settings to suit driving conditions, however a reminder that it's only a 2WD model.

Despite its size-hike over the Ford Fiesta all handling and driveability aspects the Puma proved to be sure-footed and relatively agile. Despite the stronger suspension settings and the optional larger 19-inch wheels on my test car the ride comfort was not unduly firm, and the increased ride height didn't produce noticeably more body roll during cornering. Visibility was good front and sides but a shade marginal at the rear corners and through the tailgate window so I was rather glad that the optional rear view camera was fitted.

VERDICT

Just like the sales leading Ford Fiesta and Focus in their class of family cars, the Puma sets the standard in the handling department for others to follow. Its low running costs, comprehensive equipment levels are also major reasons to give the new Puma serious consideration in a financially harsh motoring world where today realistically we should consider a move to practical motoring ways rather than egotistical ones.

Recently one major UK motoring magazine in their annual awards named the new Ford Puma ‘a game changer’, another leading publication made it their ‘Car of the Year, who’s to say they are wrong in the real motoring world.

For: Clever packaging of space for passengers and variable load area capacity, impressive use of hybrid technology for a small capacity petrol engine, good real-life fuel economy, relatively low tax/insurance costs, affordable levels of specification to suit customer’s needs and pockets, comfortable ride and sure-footed handling agility.

Against: No auto transmission option for either hybrid engine option, skimpy rear seat legroom, some hard plastic trim applications, usual ungenerous Ford warranty.

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

Ford Puma ST-Line X, 48 V mHEV hybrid-petrol.1.0 litre 155 hp, manual Crossover.

Price: £24,420 on the road (£29,370 with options).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbo petrol engine with belt-driven 11.5 kW hybrid starter/generator motor, cylinder deactivation, regenerative braking energy capture and lithium-ion battery, 155 hp, 240 Nm (177 lb.ft) of torque at 2,500 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 124 mph, 0 – 62 mph 8.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 54.3 mpg (49.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 101 g/km, VED road tax £155/£150, BiK company car tax 23%.

Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,207 mm (13.80 ft), W 1,805 mm (5.92 ft), H 1,552 mm (5.09 ft), wheelbase 2,588 mm (8.49 ft), boot/loads space 456 to 1,161 litres (14.16 to 41.00 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,100 kg (2,425 ft), five doors/five seats.