Ford Puma ST mHEV – Road Test

Published: January 29, 2024

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



The Ford Puma outran all its rivals to sit on the top of Britain’s car sales in 2023, and it’s easy to see why, explains Robin Roberts (and

WheelsWithinWales)…

Ford has a soft-spot for the Puma, first considered using it for a performance version of the Escort and then putting it on the 1997 compact coupé before shelving it a couple of years later, only to resurrect it after 17 years for the present suv series.

It has also played about with the ST and Vignale suffixes as it did with the Ghia years before, along with the famous RS badges.

Now it has sort of come full circle with the Ford Puma ST, and it’s a surprisingly complete car with potentially a very wide appeal as the industry takes cautious steps through hybrids to fully electric models in under a decade.

Today’s seven-model Puma range goes from about £25,640 to the ST Performance at £33,110 before extras. Nearly all use 125, 155 or 170 PS versions of the EcoBoost engine, but two variants can be ordered with 200 PS 1.5 litre powerplant, and depending on model have 6 speed manual or 7 speed auto boxes, all driving the front wheels.


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The only extras on the test car were the driver assistance pack – including intelligent cruise control, blind spot detection plus park assist, at £650 – and Azura Blue paint for £525.

We have tested a few Puma models over recent years since it was reborn as a small SUV and the latest version is arguably the best all-rounder.

The Ecoboost triple-pot 1.0-litre engine is produced with varying degrees of power and we evaluated the highest tuned derivative, the ST with a seven, yes seven, speed Powershift automatic gearbox.

Now you may think that’s a lot of gears for the 1.0-litre to be sorting through but in fact the powertrain is a real gem.


FORD PERFORMANCE
ECOBOOST

The dual-clutch design means there is always a gear available for imperceptible changes whether going up or down the box so the response time is milliseconds.

That not only makes it very smooth to drive in town or through country lanes, but effortless at motorway speed and also extremely economical as the engine has to do the minimum of work to extract the best performance for any situation.

The engine was surprisingly quiet for such a small capacity unless you really pushed it hard through the gears, when it became busier and keen to please, but with a lighter foot the noise was very much in the background.

Acceleration was respectable, the economy remarkable and the refinement unexpected.

The sharpness of the powertrain was matched to that of the brakes and steering, which gave it a sport-car like feeling and not a stand-offish SUV. It provided good feedback on open roads, a neat turning circle in town and you were never left in doubt which way the wheels pointed for little effort from the driver.

Underfoot, the brakes had excellent progressive and powerful action to bring it rapidly to a halt from high speed and without chilling drama. The electric parking brake securely held it on a slope and instantly released when the throttle was depressed.

Secondary controls on the column and wheelspokes were close to fingers and hands, operated silently and smoothly, with some additional rotaries on the lower fascia, but out of direct sight.

The central console was dominated by the infotainment screen and its comparatively simple displays with separate comfort controls beneath for driver and passenger, and this is a very convenient and safe arrangement compared to some all-in-one mega displays which demand attention on them and not the road ahead.

Infront of the driver it’s much the same evident thinking so you have simple gauges, not

marked in detail, but clear and supported by warning lights and mixed with various features to highlight.

The climate controls all worked well, with good directional, temperature and output settings backed up by easy to adjust fascia outlet vents.

Oddment provision was very good throughout and the bootspace is one of, if not the deepest, compartments which will hold two golf bags upright or can be extended as the offset split seat backs are dropped. Loading was effortless.

For passengers, however, the rear seats may be short of legroom if tall but there would not be the same issues in the front pair and access to all seats was very easy.

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All seats were well shaped and supportive with good adjustment on the front pair and visibility was generally good all round – but life was easier with the sensors and reversing camera specified on the test car in the options' pack.

Wipers did a good job and lights were long range with wide spread at night.

The comfort of the seats compensated for the firmness of the suspension evident at all times, but it still admirably coped with tarmac ridges and potholes nevertheless.

Handling was, as suggested, more sports car like than family hold-all and I think it strikes the right balance for most users. You could hear the suspension working away.

VERDICT

So the Ford Puma ST Ecoboost doesn't give shocks but a lot of pleasant surprises which probably go a long way to explaining why it was Britain's most popular car last year.

For: Very good handling, economical, comfortable, highly equipped, well finished, fairly roomy, lively performance, practical small suv.

Against: Intrusive road noise with firm ride, tight in the backseats.


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FAST FACTS

Model: Ford Puma ST mHEV

Price: £32,935

Mechanical: 170 PS 3-cyl petrol-hybrid, 7 sp auto

Max Speed: 130 mph

0 – 62 mph: 7.4 sec

Combined MPG: 41.5

Insurance Group: 22

C02 emissions: 144 g/km

Bik rating: 29%, £245FY, £180SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.23 m (13.88 ft), W 1.81 m (5.94 ft), H 1.54 m (5.05 ft)

Bootspace: 456 to 1,216 litres (16.10 to 42.94 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,280 kg (2,822 lb)

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