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Latest Ford Focus – Road Test

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FORD'S NEW FOCUS FAMILY GAINS ACTIVE MEMBERS...

...by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Ford has added a new member to its Active family - the Ford Focus Active available as a five door hatchback or estate. It joins their Fiesta Active and Ka+ Active line-up.

Ford Active models are termed crossovers models combining mild SUV styling whilst retaining the brand's strong driving dynamics. Active specification includes raised ground clearance and driving position, roof bars and additional bodywork protective cladding. The Active models also have their own unique chassis tuning and steering knuckle geometry.



The latest Active family member joins the all-new Ford Focus family of hatchbacks and estates. It is differentiated by 30 mm (1.18in) of extra ground clearance, front and rear skid plates, SUV inspired front end design with a dark mesh grille, Active branded door sill scuff plates, black wheelarch mouldings, selectable driving modes with additional Slippery and Trail modes and 17 or 18-inch alloy wheels with deeper walled tyres, depending upon the spec level. There are Active and Active X with prices of £21,905 to £28,255 for the Focus Active hatchbacks and £23,005 to £29,355 for the Focus Active estates.

Adding an off-road style and sometimes 4WD traction to conventional family cars is of course not new. Skoda has its Scout models, Audi has its Allroads, Vauxhall has their Insignia Country Tourer estate, Volvo has Cross Country versions and Volkswagen has Alltrack models.

The Focus Active range, depending on spec level, comes with a choice of 1.0 litre EcoBoost 125 hp and 1.5 litre EcoBoost 150 hp petrol engines and 1.5 litre EcoBlue 120 hp and 2.0 litre EcoBlue 150 hp turbodiesel units. All engines can be chosen with either six speed manual or eight speed automatic transmissions, and all models are 2WD albeit with a traction control and ABS braking system. This, through the Slippery and Trail driving modes function, can give the vehicle some limited degree of added grip for gravel tracks, wet grass and of course winter road conditions. Other driving modes are Normal, Eco and Sport.



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The characterful looking Active models have a mid range familiar Zetec level of specification but with additional items including 17-inch alloy wheels, cornering function LED front fog lights, twin exhaust tailpipes, rear privacy glass, additional selectable driving modes, keyless Ford Power Start button, SYNC 3 with voice control, a 4.2-inch TFT info cluster screen in the instrument binnacle and sat-nav. Front and rear parking sensors cost an extra £375 but are a worthwhile addition.

Active X added spec over Active are 18-inch wheels, panorama glass roof, body coloured



electric folding door mirrors with puddle lights, front and rear parking sensors, auto wipers, partial leather trim, six-way electric adjustable driver's seat, heated front seats and dual zone electronic air temperature control.

The Ford Focus Active X version I tried was the top of the range estate (most Focus estate UK sales will be for Active versions), powered by a 2.0 litre EcoBlue 150 hp turbodiesel engine with the eight speed auto gearbox, and was priced at £29,355. The Active spec estate version with the same engine/transmission costs £25,405. Both look good value for money against the current fashionable mid-sized SUVs, most of which are only bought with 2WD anyway.

The Active X estate is very similar to drive as any other new generation Focus, be it hatchback or load-lugger models. The steering is very precise and well-weighted with good feedback, the ride is compliant with the deeper walled tyres actually adding to ride comfort over poorer road surfaces without harming the handling, longer motorway runs proved to be relaxing and overall the handling, despite the taller suspension dampers and springs, proved to be really well balanced just like any other new Focus model.



Inside, with the added Active/Active X spec, the Focus looks a really grown up well-equipped estate car with lots of soft feel interior trim. It has well laid out controls and instruments, really quite classy and a nice place to be for either the retail or high mileage business driver. My only personal niggle was with the rotary gear selector – I much prefer the conventional short gear shift lever – and the other downside item was the fact that the start button is hidden behind the rim of the steering wheel. Otherwise every other control came to hand nicely and thankfully heating and ventilation controls are separate from having to use the 8.0-inch touchscreen to operate them.

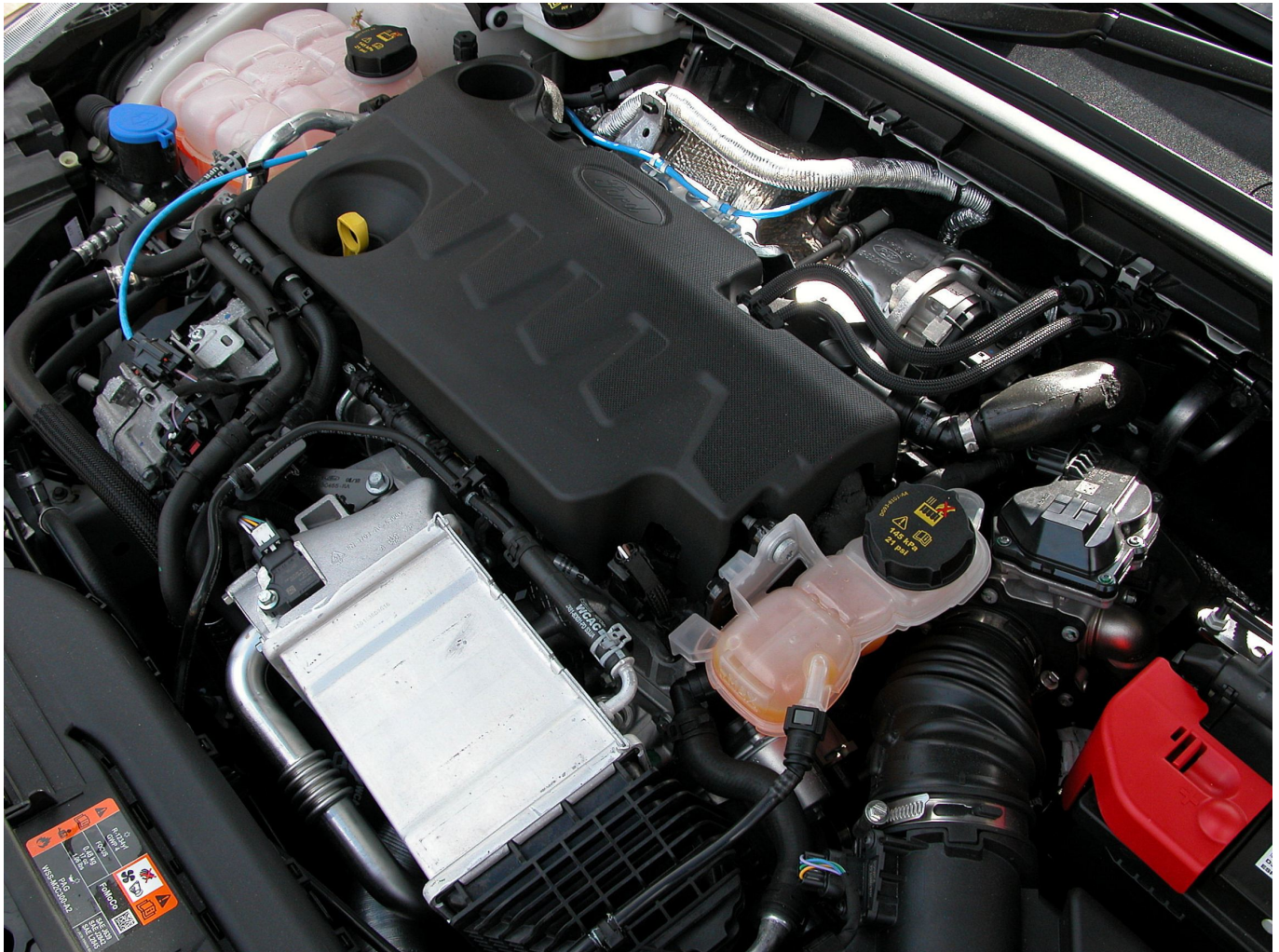
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The latest Focus hatchback or estates, whatever the spec level, are roomy vehicles in their C-sector and we should not forget that the Focus is Ford's second highest-selling model range after the Ford Fiesta and it is usually the third best-selling new car range in the UK after the Ford Fiesta and VW Golf. There is no reason that the Active models should not bolster its appeal given the increased desire by new car buyers to own an SUV or crossover type of vehicle. I think the Active X treatment for the Focus estate in particular gives the car even better kerb appeal with the rugged styling additions giving it more character.

For the record every Focus model is a five seater with ample rear seat space for family use and the estate has a boot space of 728 litres (25.71 cu.ft) increasing to 1,620 litres (57.21 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down. By comparison the Focus hatchback offers 443 to 1,320 litres (15.64 to 46.62 cu.ft). So for family or business use in its sector the latest Focus really measures up to meet modern travel needs. The Active/Active X treatment not only adds more hard-core crossover styling, but also the added ground clearance and extra poor driving condition traction modes add to its capabilities whether it's used for recreational family fun or business use such as vets, surveyors and such like. With its 2.0 litre diesel engine and automatic transmission it will also tow up to 1,600 kg (3,527 lb).

That brings me nicely to the engine and transmission performance of my Focus Active X estate. This latest EcoBlue specification unit produces 150 hp but more importantly a healthy 370 Nm (273 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm. This provides ample 'grunt working responsively with the eight speed auto gearbox. The top gears are overdrive ratios which add to the estate's fuss-free and low noise high speed cruising abilities. Country road driving with hills and bends were dealt with easily and in-town stop-start driving was a doddle.



Now I know diesel power is not popular but the latest EU 6d TEMP compliant diesel engines should hold no fears for owners, especially those who cover high mileage journeys. Officially this unit will return 51.4 mpg in the new WLTP Combined Cycle and my week of test driving returned 50.1 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 117 g/km so First Year diesel rate VED road tax costs £210 with the following Standard rate costing £145. Company car drivers will pay 31% Benefit-in-Kind tax, high because of the ill-informed extra 4% added because it's a diesel powered engine even though it's a latest modern technology unit. Insurance is Group 21E and the warranty the ever-ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.



VERDICT

If an all too common mid-sized SUV isn't for you try something different and if carrying space is 'a must' then the Ford Focus Active X estate car will fit the bill unless all-wheel drive is a necessity.

For: Ideal as an alternative to the now too-commonplace mid-sized SUVs, characterful exterior styling, high quality interior, very well-equipped, good value for money, comfortable ride, well-balanced handling, strong engine, good fuel economy, selectable driving modes.

Against: No proper 4WD option, unjust higher diesel tax rates, fiddly rotary gear selector, hidden start/stop button, ungenerous warranty.



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

New Ford Focus Active X estate, 2.0L EcoBlue Start/Stop, eight speed auto.

Price: £29,355.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder EcoBlue turbodiesel. 150 hp, 370 Nm (273 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, eight speed automatic with front wheel drive and



on/off road driving modes.

Performance: 127 mph, 0-62 mph 9.3-seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 51.4 mpg (50.1 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 117 g/km, VED diesel First Year rate road tax £210 then £145 Standard rate, BiK diesel rate company car tax 31%.

Insurance Group: 21E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,693 mm (15.40 ft), W 1,844 mm (6.05 ft), H 1,532 mm (5.03 ft), boot/load space 728 to 1,620 litres (25.71 to 57.21 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,600 kg (3,527 lb), five seats/five doors.