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Latest SEAT Ibiza News and FR version Road Test

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The new SEAT Ibiza FR is here and it's here to stay.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The new fifth generation SEAT Ibiza hatchback is only available as a five door and it is the first model in the Volkswagen Group of brands to use the new MQB AO modular platform –even before VW's own new Polo supermini sized hatchback comes to market next year.

The Ibiza has been the Spanish brand's best selling model range and the first four generations have spanned over 30 years accruing 5.4 million global sales. The new Ibiza has



no doubt played an important part in SEAT's 20% UK sales increase so far this year in a new car market down overall by almost 4%. Whilst the supermini 'B' segment remains the largest selling sector of the UK's new car market, even it fell by over 21% during the new '67' plate registration month of September, and the only sector to show growth was SUVs with an increase of 2.4%

Designed and built in Barcelona, the all-new Ibiza competes for sales against the new Ford Fiesta, which remains the UK's best-selling car overall, the new Renault Clio, the Citroen C3, Nissan Micra, Kia Rio, Hyundai i20, Honda Jazz, the soon to be replaced VW Polo, the Vauxhall Corsa and the popular and less costly Skoda Fabia, to name but a few.

Prices for the all-new Ibiza five door hatchbacks range from £13,130 up to £17,680. Currently all the engines are petrol units with TDI diesel units expected to be added in due course, although demand for diesel engines is reducing, especially in small car sectors. The latest Ibiza line-up also includes the VW Group's new 1.5 litre TSI EVO 1.5 litre cylinder on demand turbo petrol unit with 150 hp. For now the mainstay engines are 1.0 litre three-cylinder petrol units with the 75 hp normally aspirated MPI unit, plus the TSI turbo 95 and 115 hp units. Depending on the engine chosen there are S, SE, SE Technology, SE Design, FR and Xcellence specification levels. The Combined Cycle fuel economy ranges from 57.6 to 60.1 mpg for these units with CO2 emissions ranging from 106 to 112 g/km. Insurance groups vary from 2E up to 17E.

My test car was the Ibiza 1.0 TSI FR 115 hp with a six-speed manual gearbox, priced at £16,630, but with this engine and FR specification a DSG twin clutch auto is available for £17,710.



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The first thing I noticed about the new Ibiza, apart from its sharp styling lines, was its larger size. Like most new generation supermini hatchbacks the latest models have grown in size to accommodate us as we get bigger in size, plus of course these new cars add more safety equipment and customers want higher specification features as we downsize from larger cars. The Ibiza is now 4,059 mm (13.32 ft) in length, it's 87 mm (3.43 in) wider inside and the important part of the increase in dimensions is an extra 95 mm (3.74 in) in the wheelbase length which improves rear seat legroom. There is a larger boot which goes up by 63 litres (2.22 cu.ft) to 355 litres (12.54 cu.ft) with the three rears seats in use or 823 litres (29.06 cu.ft) with the rear seatbacks folded. It's a pity the rear seat backs do not fold completely flat to make loading long items easier.



With its chiselled exterior styling and the FR detailed specification of its slightly low ride height via its sports suspension, dark tinted rear windows, black door mirror casings, FR sports style rear bumper, plus 17-inch alloy wheels and twin exhaust pipes, it looks an 'agile' car and indeed it is.

Inside the FR sports theme continues with a flat-bottomed steering wheel, sports seats, bespoke FR cloth upholstery and the 8.0-inch touchscreen is canted towards the driver to add to that sporting feel. This spec level also includes rain-sensing wipers, the variable driving mode functions of Normal, Sport and Eco, 3D sat-nav with voice recognition, Mirror Link, Apple CarPlay and Google Android Auto connectivity, alarm and a tiredness recognition alert function.

Electric front windows, air-con, on-board computer and cruise control are carried over into the FR model from lower spec variants. Strangely missing from this most popular FR specification are front and rear parking sensors and the rear side door windows are manually operated which I found annoying when trying to pull out of some side road junctions early in the morning when the windows were wet from overnight rain. It is only the top spec Xcellence level which has front and rear parking sensors and a rear view camera but still no electrically operated rear door windows. In addition to the standard equipment there is a full range of extra cost options for owners to personalize their particular model of choice, the parking sensors can be added to the FR spec level with the £425 Vision Pack but I couldn't find an electric rear window option for any model. If you want a space-saver spare wheel it will cost you another £100 for all variants.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Although the most popular FR spec level is available with the 95 hp version of the 1.0 litre three-cylinder TSI turbo petrol engine, it is the 115 hp unit I tried that does justice to this racy little number. But it's not all about speed because this highly rated engine, matched perfectly to a really smooth and precise manual gearchange transmission, is a delight. It's docile and flexible in traffic and it's nippy and responsive on the open road. With 200 Nm



(148 lb.ft) of torque available from 2,000 to 3,500 rpm it covers most driving conditions, and excels for its capacity for responsive acceleration on winding country roads, yet remaining unstressed when cruising at 70mph. Top speed is 121 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is an impressive 9.3 seconds.

It's also relatively fuel-efficient but in real-life not as good as the official Combined Cycle figure of 60.1 mpg. My week long test driving saw a regular 52 mpg on longer runs but with some country road and in-town driving thrown in the real-life figure ended up at 48.3 mpg -which I was happy with, but not close to the official figure. The all-important CO2 emissions are just 108 g/km so VED road tax is £140 every year. Company car drivers will pay 20% Benefit-in-Kind tax and insurance is Group 12E.



Whilst you immediately notice the larger size of the new Ibiza both inside and out, it's only when you drive it do you really feel the improvements it brings to this sector. Yes the engine is a delight but so is the handling. SEAT's FR models, Ibiza and Leon in the past because of their sporting heritage, have generally been hard-riding vehicles. Yes the Ibiza FR has a sports suspension but it's not too firm and the ride is compliant. Impacts from large potholes are of course felt inside the cabin but not to any great extent, although there is more road noise intrusion than is ideal. The past hard rigid ride over rippled surfaces has been ironed out with this new VW Group platform. The bodyshell is 30% stiffer and there are wider front and rear tracks which improve the overall balance and handling. You also



quickly notice the very sharp and precise steering which makes the Ibiza very agile. It has really good and predictable front end cornering grip and at the opposite end of the driving scale it is nimble around town and easy to park – but the missing parking sensors would have helped even more in that situation.

VERDICT

Overall the Ibiza has always been a popular choice of car. With the addition of more interior space, sharp sporty exterior styling, the availability of new generation petrol engines and attractive pricing in this competitive sector where there are finance deals and scrappage scheme options to be had, there probably isn't a better time to consider moving into an Ibiza.

For: First use of VW Group's new supermini sector platform, more interior space, sharp styling, improved handling with a more compliant ride, impressively responsive 115 hp turbo petrol engine.

Against: Some road noise intrusion, missing parking sensors and electric rear windows for this near top spec FR, rear seat backs do not fold down completely flat, real-life fuel economy fell too far short of the official Combined Cycle figure.



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

All-new SEAT Ibiza five door, 1.0 TSI FR 115 hp, manual.

Price: £16,630.

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbo-petrol, 115 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six speed manual.



Performance: 121 mph, 0-62 mph 9.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 60.1 mpg (48.3 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 108 g/km, VED road tax £140, BiK company car tax 20%.

Insurance Group: 12E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,059 mm (13.32 ft), W 1,780 mm (5.84 ft), H 1,444 mm (4.74 ft), boot 355 to 823 litres (12.54 to 29.06 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2,646 lb), five doors/five seats.