SEAT Ibiza FR Road Test

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Keith Ward Test Drives a Sport SEAT...

THE Fiesta-sized and Barcelona-built Ibiza, available as a five-door hatchback, three-door SC coupe and a five-door ST estate, has traditionally been SEAT's bulk seller over the last 30 years and was revamped at the back end of last year (2015).

Nothing much to speak of externally, but with changes to running gear and an upgraded interior with the availability of enhanced tech-toys, notably the latest "Live" edition of SEAT's so-called Portable System – standard on the FR version – to give such as weather, traffic, points of interest and local speed camera information.

It also packs in satellite navigation, Bluetooth phone operation, a vehicle information computer, and audio playback, while all the major systems can also be activated via voice

control. I was grateful for the friendly active sat-nav's spotting of a motorway jam up ahead of me and plotting a smooth arrival at my destination via nearby trunk roads to catch a theatre date.

The five-door hatch version alone of the Ibiza runs to a vast 28-strong range priced between £12,100 and £17,635 and taking in a choice of nine engines – six petrol and three diesels – plus eight trim levels.

It is tested here in up-range sporty FR trim with a nippy four-cylinder 110 PS turbocharged 1.2 petrol engine at a tempting £14,935. (Reckon generally on a three-door SC coupe around £450 cheaper and an ST estate £700 dearer, both offering a similar wide range of engines and trim).

SEAT being part of the VW Group, the Ibiza shares a lot of features with its siblings, the VW Polo and Skoda Fabia, both of which in five-door form surprisingly undercut in starting price the Ibiza, albeit ignoring spec differences. You could however find SEAT more than compensating with its frequent special deals in the showroom.

The FR has its own visual appeal, via exclusive bumpers, twin exhaust pipes, special badging and, on our car, bigger 17-inch alloys with rather noisy 215/40 Bridgestones.

Inside, there's comfortable seating for four average adults, or three in the back at a squeeze. This is a compact car, after all. A deep-ish boot behind a high rear sill can be extended by a two-stage folding of the divided rear seat. Storage is not generous – skimpy front door pockets and none in the rear, nor a central box.



Driving

On the road, there's an impression of sportiness as you sit wrapped in an FR body-hugging sports seat astride a beefed-up sports suspension, twirl the sawn-off steering wheel sheathed in red-stitched leather and flick easily between gears, even if the performance figures (0-60 in 9.1 seconds) suggest a warm rather than hot hatch. Nevertheless, it's an enjoyable drive.

An overall mpg average of under 50 in our hands pitched below an official Combined 55-plus, but the Band C emissions rating restricts VED to £30 annually after a first year free.

Clear instruments include, as VAG custom, the valued sat-nav repeater info panel on the

instrument binnacle ahead of you. It usefully gives you a count-down to upcoming junctions. Lacking was a lights-on confirmation symbol, although an unusual written reminder would flash up to switch off your rear fog light (in
kindness to the driver behind you).

If it's extra power you are after, be aware that introduced in March this year (2016) was a new Cupra version of the Ibiza. Only offered in three-door SC form, it sports a new 192 PS 1.8 TSI engine in place of the former 180 PS 1.4, plus a six-speed manual gearbox instead of DSG automatic.

It claims 0-62 in 6.7 seconds; top speed 146 mph. Price from £18,100.

Or if you prefer to sit high rather than scorch the tarmac, note that in the SEAT pipeline for next Spring (2017) is an SUV version of the Ibiza, a rival for the Nissan Juke and a baby brother for SEAT's first-ever SUV due on UK sale this September, the Ateca.


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Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:
SEAT Ibiza FR 1.2 TSI 110PS

Body: Hatchback; 5 door; length 4,061 mm (13.32 ft); width 1,693 mm (5.55 ft); gross weight 1,590 kg.

Dimensions: Boot Length 690 mm extending to 1,290 mm (2.26 to 4.23 ft); width 960 mm (3.15 ft); volume 430 to 1,164 litres (15.19 to 41.11 cu.ft).
Engine: Petrol; four cylinder; 1,197 cc; turbo.

Transmission: Six speed manual.

Power: 110 PS @ 4,600–5,600 rpm.

Max torque: 175 Nm (129 lb.ft) from 1,550 rpm.

Pace: 0-60 in 9.1 secs; max 122 mph.

MPG: On test 48.7; official Combined 55.4

Emissions and taxation: CO2 119 g/km; Road tax band C; VED Nil then £30; Benefit-in-Kind tax liability 18%.

Tyres: 215/40; R17 Bridgestone

Insurance Group: 18

Warranty: 36 months/60,000 miles; 12 yrs anti-rust; 3 yrs paint; 2 yrs breakdown

Price: £14,935
Rivals: VW Polo; Skoda Fabia; Mazda 2; Ford Fiesta; Peugeot 208; Vauxhall Corsa,

Renault Clio, Hyundai i20.