The new 2017 Dacia Sandero Stepway – First Impressions

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Robin Roberts (Wales Better News Agency) test drives a cost effective and practical new model from Dacia.

A Dacia is the first new car of choice for used buyers who want to move up the motoring ladder.

From its UK launch in 2013, the Renault-owned Dacia brand sold 17,000 in 12 months and it's rapidly climbed ever since, adding about 5% each year to 26,500 sales last year. Around 95% of UK sales go to retail customers.

60% of sales Dacia UK sales are the Sandero hatch and its off-shoot SUV styled Stepway models with the Duster SUV accounting for 30% of registrations and the Logan Estate the rest.

Dacia has the Duster SUV in 2WD and 4WD forms, four trim levels, 110 diesel or 115 and 120 petrol engines, and with prices ranging from under £9,500 to almost £16,900. The Logan Estate is priced between £6,995 and £11,400 in three versions, with the 90 hp diesel or choice of 75 and 90 hp petrol engines and up to 1,518 litres (53.61 cu.ft) loadspace.

Sandero is a five door hatch in normal or Stepway SUV bodysyles, the widest line-up in the overall range and priced from £5,995 to £11,395. But they are all only 2WD despite appearances, with three trim specifications and 75 or 90 hp petrol units and 90 hp diesel. The elevated stance and extra SUV bodywork cladding the Stepway has proved so popular that it’s being added shortly to the Logan Estate range, which will gain a Stepway variant.

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Dacia brand manager Louise Sullivan said the increase in sales is down to the value-for-money proposition, equipment and warranty appeal, particularly to 47% of drivers who have previously only owned a used car.

“We are getting people coming over to us from all brands, including up market older models, who really appreciate the Dacia package and pricing,” she said.

“One of the big attractions is our fixed prices so buyers know they don’t have to haggle. We also have models in popular sectors such as hatchbacks and SUV and the range is straightforward.”

Dacia has 161 UK dealers who are already Renault outlets and they have a good customer base around the country, but the Isle of White and Wales are particularly good areas for them.

The dealers tend to be well established family businesses with a strong community link and the Dacia buyers appreciate that, she added.

“We often get one owner recommending to another family member or a friend and they buy one, and so on.”

The economy can also influence buying habits at times, said Ms Sullivan, who added, “If people are feeling uncertain about the economy they want to hang onto their money, look for some security, and see our brand with its Renault backing providing a new car which is not too expensive. As more appear on the roads buyers also feel more confident.”

For the better-off families a new Dacia is often seen as a good second car to have for general runabout journeys rather than a potentially troublesome second-hand model.

In 2017 there is for the first time a Dacia Duster automatic option with the 110 diesel engine and this is expected to widen further the car’s appeal, and a 1.0 three cylinder low emissions engine is coming later this year to the range.

Dacia has facelifted the models front and back, given them a make-over inside and generally raised the trim level quality and included a higher quality sound system for buyers to enjoy.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We opted to briefly test the best selling Sandero Stepway which is their best-selling model. Whilst Sandero is their best-selling model range, accounting for 60% of Dacia's UK sales, 40% of that total is for the enhanced Stepway SUV styled version with its extra ground clearance and additional bodywork protection, and it appeals because of the current fad, must-have SUV styling wanted by first-time new car buyers.

Even with the added cost metallic paint and emergency spare wheel our Sandero Stepway Ambiance TCe 90 test car worked out under £9,400 – and it comes with a three year/60,000 mile warranty.

The petrol three cylinder 898cc Renault powertrain is proven and reliable even if modest in its 90 hp output, but it had an easy-going performance and composure on main roads.

On winding roads demanding frequent gearchanges the noise level went up, but the long travel clutch and short-throw five-speed lever were comfortable, as was the steering.

You could hear the suspension working away and the ride was slightly firm but rarely shook us about and the seats were comfortable. Instruments were a little basic and small, a lot of plastic was visible and oddments room was only reasonable.

VERDICT

For the money it offers new car reassurance when you might be tempted into a second hand car and a lot of buyers want that, which explains why Dacia has been successful.

For: Economical to buy and run, good boot space, comfortable seats, clear visibility, light controls.

Against: Lots of plain plastic trim inside, constant road noise and busy engine note when pressed, dated instruments.



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

Dacia Sandero Stepway Ambiance TCe 90 hatchback.

Price: £8,795 (£9,390 inc metallic paint & emergency wheel as tested).
Engine/transmission: Three cylinder 898cc, 90 hp, 140 Nm (103 lb.ft), turbo-petrol, five speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 104 mph, 0-62 mph: 11.1-seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 55.4 mpg (36 mpg estimated – no onboard computer readout).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 115 g/km, VED £0/£30, BIK company car tax 20%.

Insurance Group: 8E.

Warranty: Three years/ 60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4.09 m (13.42 ft), W 1.74 m (5.71 ft), H 1.62 m (5.31 ft), boot space 320 to 1,200 litres (11.30 to 42.38 cu.ft).