

Ford Focus

Featuring 1.6LX and 1.8 Zetec



AFTER A SUCCESSION OF WINNERS FROM Ford, everyone was expecting the new Focus to be good – in contrast to the Escort it replaces, which was Ford's last failure. Not that Escort has failed in the marketplace of UK PLC; brand loyalty and the effectiveness of Ford's marketing machine have kept it at or near the top of the sales charts throughout the nineties. Indeed, a much more restricted range of Escorts will continue to be produced alongside the new Focus.

However, Focus's clean-sheet-of-paper design has enabled Ford's development engineers to bring to market the kind of Astra and Golf rival a much more discriminating public now expects in the lower-medium family car sector. The styling is courageously avant-garde, but the radicalism goes more than skin deep. Still faithful to the basic mechanical layout of the Escort, Focus uses all new or fundamentally redesigned engines, independent rear suspension and conveys a distinctly "fun-to-drive" personality from the moment you get in.

This certainly applies to Zetec models – the variants with slightly stiffer suspension and 15in alloy wheels, as well as other minor equipment differences inside. This

treatment suits the 1.8 and especially the two-litre versions admirably, particularly if you're seeking today's equivalent of what used to be called a GTi.

These power units have received a significant rework to quell noise, vibration and harshness since they made their first, undistinguished appearance in the Escort, and it's been largely successful, particularly at the lower end – our 1.8 felt positively demure from as low as 1250rpm, and although the two litre in particular can still become a bit gruff as the red line is approached, it's a vast improvement. Indeed, the throaty exhaust note goes well with the stiffer-riding, agile handling Zetec, although the prominent tyre rumble is less welcome.

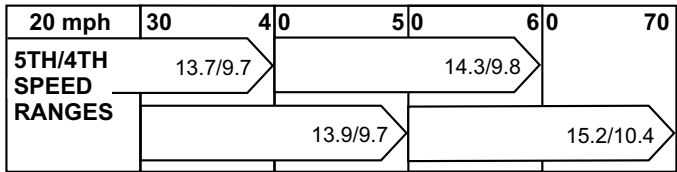
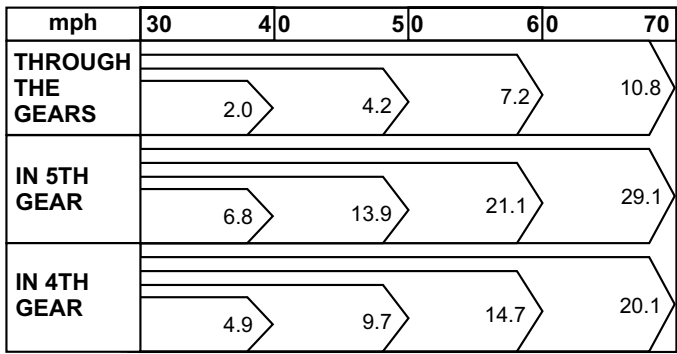
Choose a 1.6LX and there's less of each, yet by comparison with a VW Golf or Citroën Xsara, the Focus LX still doesn't ride as well, particularly if you're a disinterested rear passenger. It's a nice drive for the one behind the wheel, however, with this new engine proving both smooth and lively when revved. Longer-legged gearing than the Astra uses, contributes towards its slower in-gear acceleration, but the reward is similar excellent fuel economy – it's a long time since a Ford could match a Vauxhall in this respect. We couldn't

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1.6LX

PERFORMANCE

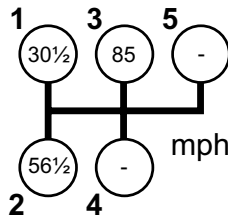
Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds



* for best acceleration

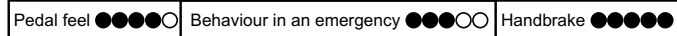


FUEL CONSUMPTION

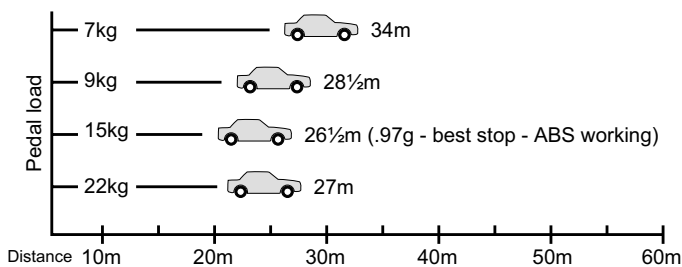
Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	27
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34
Motorway (70mph cruising)	40
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	41
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	49
Typical mpg overall	40½

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

BRAKES



Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)
A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load

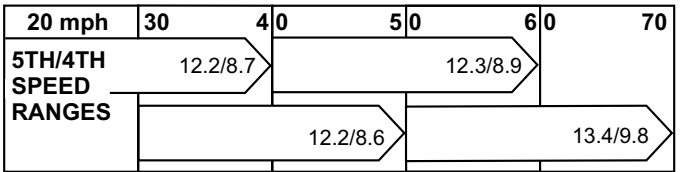
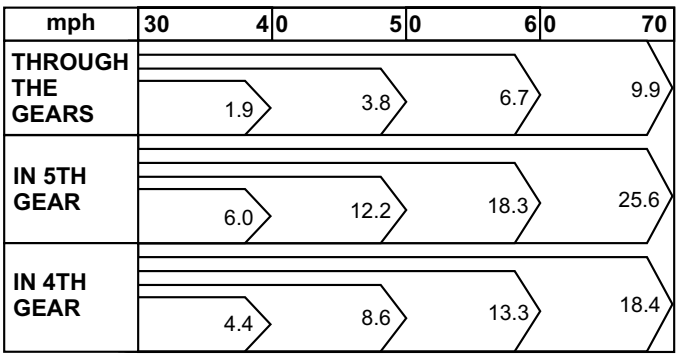


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
7½kg at start of test, 7½kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

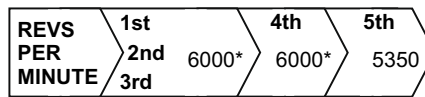
1.8 ZETEC

PERFORMANCE

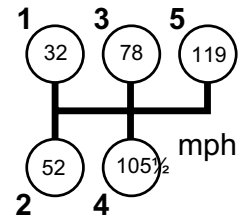
Acceleration time in seconds



Maximum speeds



* for best acceleration

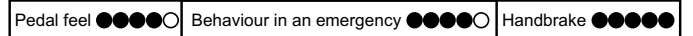


FUEL CONSUMPTION

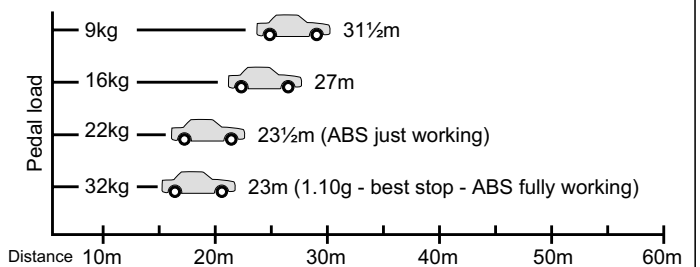
Fuel grade: unleaded Premium - 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	26
In the country - quiet driving	42
Typical mpg overall	35½
Realistic tank range	47 litres/365 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

BRAKES - (with 15in alloys)



Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)
A good-to-average best stop with ABS is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load



Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
7½kg at start of test, 7½kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

SAFETY & SECURITY FEATURES - LX

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience
(the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Head restraints

front ●●○○○ rear ●●●○○

Interior

safety padding ●●●○○
driver's airbag?
other airbags?
side impact protection ●●●●○

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

standard on test car factory fitted option not available

Door locking

central locking?
remote control?
auto window closure?
deadlocks?

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm

engine immobilised?

Euro NCAP crash test results -Front/side impact rating ◆◆◆◆◆
- Pedestrian test rating ◆◆◆◆◆

FOR THE TECHNICAL – 1.6 (1.8 in brackets where different)

ENGINE

Type transverse four in line; all-alloy (iron block/alloy head) with five main bearings

Size 79 x 81.4mm = 1596cc (80.6 x 88mm = 1796cc)

Power 100bhp at 6000rpm (115 at 5750rpm)

Torque 107 lb ft at 4000rpm (116 at 3750rpm)

Valves belt-driven twin overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via bucket tappets

Fuel/ignition electronic, multi-point petrol injection with integrated, programmed spark timing. Three-way exhaust catalyser and 55-litre tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive (four-speed auto with torque converter optional)

Mph per 1000rpm 22.2 in 5th; 17.7 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent damper/struts with coil springs. Rear: multi-link independent system with coil springs. Telescopic dampers and anti-roll bars all round

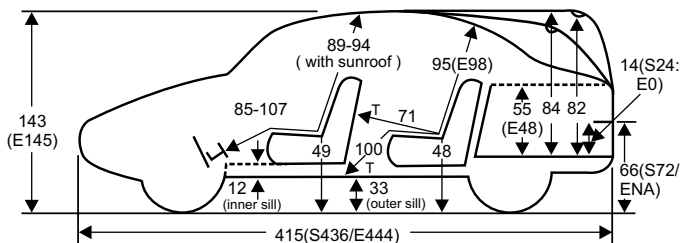
Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.6m between kerbs, with 15.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 5½in steel standard with 175/70R14T tyres (optional extra alloy with 195/55R15H tyres)

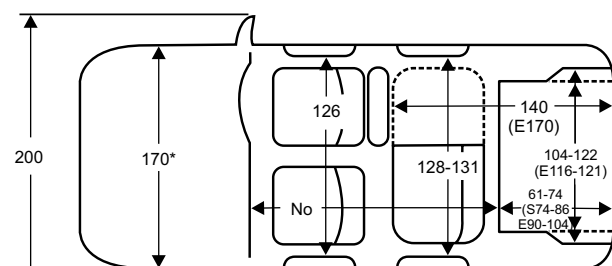
Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear (solid discs on Zetec 1.8) with vacuum servo and optional electronic anti-lock (ABS) control (combined with traction and stability control) fitted to both test cars

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres Hatchback (Saloon = S; E = Estate where different)



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants
NA: not available



*with mirrors folded

measure the top speed, because Ford had a limiter built into the engine-management system on this early production sample, which caused it to misfire at around 113mph.

We love the steering, with no lost motion, some genuine feel of the road and a zest for brisk cornering conveyed by the car's inherently stable responses. More's the pity, therefore, that the LX's driving seat has its limitations. The lower range seats don't possess lumbar adjustment, the absence of which is made worse by a cushion-only height adjuster that allows a gap to open up between it and the fixed backrest as it's lowered - not a good idea.

Some minor switches and warning lamps are oddly placed and the ventilation system hasn't got much go in it, with no flow at all when the direction control is set to "screen" or "floor". The heater has to spend a lot of its time on the second fan speed, but warmth is spread evenly to all footwells; use too low a heat setting, however (perhaps to coax some cooler flow to the face-level vents) and the front passenger's supply turns cold.

Radical "new edge" styling is manifested both inside and out, with lots of swoops and curves; the practical snag is that when you try to reverse, optical confusion gangs up with prominent pillars to make accurate parking really hard.

The interior accommodation is more than generous; cleverly, the unusual styling disguises the fact that Focus has a tall build that enhances rear cabin space, especially, with a nicely angled seat profile. These comments apply to all three body styles on offer, but rear luggage decks are bigger on the saloon and especially the estate car, which is a really serious, yet (to our eyes) remarkably elegant load carrier.

It's a pity that the hatch's back seat cushion isn't split (like the backrest) because it means that you can't have a flat load floor beside a third occupant. The seat folds without disrupting the seatbelt sockets, which is convenient, although the head restraints have to be removed.

The Focus has great body stiffness, which not only contributes to the fine handling, but provides an excellent basis for injury prevention in an impact. All five seatbelts are the pretensioning sort and their action at the front is linked to timed deployment of the twin standard airbags. Where fitted, the anti-lock brakes come with traction control and cornering stability control - all electronically governed. It works, too, but the combined package is an optional extra on all current versions, whether CL or Ghia - this seems a shame on a product of the company which pioneered standard fitment ABS.

Both of our test cars were so fitted and on the 1.8 Zetec especially (with its 55-Series radials) results were excellent. The emergency stop is well above average and both cars had handbrakes that proved both light and highly effective, locking the back wheels without too much tugging. Fade is non-existent.

Ford's quest for lower insurance costs has been successful (most are Groups 4 to 6) and this has led to bonnet opening by key, a handset with three buttons on some models and a perimeter alarm on most. Even the rear door child locks use the key, as well - which represents a different kind of security.

VERDICT

“Reassuring, yet loads of fun,” will probably sum up the Focus ownership experience. Up-to-the-minute engines in the smaller (1.4 and 1.6) versions, adapted from the Fiesta’s, plus a new independent rear suspension have made major contributions to these bread-and-butter versions’ feel-good factor. Yet the traditional low operating costs and ease of mechanical access for repairs remain uncompromised and make the Focus very practical to own.

More muscle as well as higher prices will undoubtedly feature in the bigger-engined versions’ credentials, but the nice thing about Focus is that you don’t have to pay more to enjoy yourself. If you can handle the looks, you’ll love the handling, and your passengers the accommodation – though some may hanker for a bit more absorbency over the bumps and ruts.

We predict that it’s not only Ford loyalists who are going to make this new model the focus of their attention.

LIKES AND GRIPES

Dial lighting/headlamp beam trimmer easy to differentiate	...	but roof lamp at front only
Sensible electric, folding door mirrors	...	but inside mirror stuck to glass
Efficient, easily operated radio/cassette	...	but some other minor switches much harder to find
Rake- and reach-adjustable steering	...	but seat adjustments less satisfactory (see text)
All versions have protected load sills	...	but not bumpers or door sills – just painted
Interlinked wash/wipe and intermittent wipe front and rear	...	but there are always dribbles afterwards
“State-of-the-art” cup holders	...	but poor provision for cassettes
Immobiliser	...	but three-button handset confusing and not so powerful



HOW THE FOCUS 5-DOOR COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom - front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
FORD FOCUS 1.6LX	1596/100	3150	10.8	29.1/20.1	40½	26½/15*	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	415
Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v LS	1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
VW Golf 1.6S	1595/100	3540	10.8	23.3/17.3	35	27½/18*	111	95/71	3.1/10.4	415
Rover 416i	1589/111	3570	10.3	22.9/16.8	39	26/14*	111	99/70	3.5/10.5	432
Toyota Corolla 1.6	1587/109	3480	10.1	23.8/18.5	38	26/20*	106	93/68	3.2/10.5	427
Ford Escort 1.6	1597/90	3100	12.2	32.0/22.3	36½	26/27*	107	99/71	3.0/10.4	414
						*with ABS			(p) all power-assisted	