

ROAD TEST | FOCUS ZETEC

THE all-new Focus estate shows perfectly why buyers are switching back to this style from hatchbacks.

Ford expect it to account for a much bigger percentage of Focus sales than the previous estate. And it's not difficult to see why – it answers just about every motoring need of the growing family.

In bright candy red metallic paint, my test-drive estate caught the eye for all the right reasons with its sleek design.

It passed the load lugging test with a sizeable 476 litres of space that rises to 1,502 with the rear seats down, compared with 316 and 1,101 for the hatch.

The estate also delivers a near-identical driving package to the hatch, which means class-leading handling and ride comfort.

Add in a slick, six-speed gearbox and a comprehensive range of petrol and diesel engines and you have an estate that is fun

to drive around town, on demanding A-roads and long motorway journeys.

Go for the new 1.6litre petrol and turbo-diesel engines that have Ford's Ecoboost technology, including start/stop that automatically shuts down the engine at traffic lights and junctions to save fuel.

I'd opt for the 1.6 diesel – despite some slight clatter at low speeds, it is remarkably smooth on the move and Ford claim that with a light right foot you get 76mpg.

I struggled to reach more than 60mpg – still good economy for an estate – but I do have a very heavy right foot.

You are pampered with all the luxury and latest gadgets on the new estate – although many come as a cost option.

Prices start at £17,100 for the 1.6litre petrol. The 1.6 diesel Zetec I tested is £21,615 with a host of extras and the range-topping 2litre diesel Titanium X is £25,100.

VERDICT: 8/10

THEY used to be seen as boring and boxy – but now they are ESTATE of the art.

Today's estates are style leaders, far removed from the mundane, middle-of-the-road image of yesteryear.

They are vehicles for all seasons, practical, versatile and even desirable.

And they have added green and economical to their growing list of attributes, which is why they are increasingly important to the



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major car makers.

The numbers sold far outstrip saloons – with 294,915 new estates snapped up last year compared with just 142,328 saloons.

We've put three of the latest models to the test, to see just how much of a style statement estates now are.



Load space: 476 ltrs
Seat down: 1,502 ltrs
Price: £17,100



THREE ESTATES GET A PROPER WORKOUT

Boot camp



Load space: 633 ltrs
Seat down: 1,865 ltrs
Price: £18,550

ROAD TEST | SKODA SUPERB

I STRUGGLE with the idea of any car firm calling a model Superb, but if any car merits the name it is the Skoda estate.

It certainly looks the part, with sophisticated, elegant lines that seem considerably better than the Skoda saloon.

And if your starting point for a good estate is the ability to swallow all the clutter a family needs, this Superb is spot on.

I can vouch for its cavernous capabilities after a weekend self-catering break for four adults. You know, the kind when the wife wants to take the entire contents of the kitchen, including the sink. The Superb seemed to grow with a Tardis-like ability, accommodating four suitcases and all our other junk with ease.

Its vital statistics make impressive reading, with 633 litres of luggage space, which can grow to a huge 1,865 litres with the rear seats folded it is like having your

own delivery van. Not only the luggage gets acres of room. The driver and passengers enjoy first-class levels of comfort with great leg and head-room.

In fact, the cabin is testament to the good quality a Skoda has become. Sometimes I think Volkswagen owners must wonder how Skoda manage to do it while still costing less than a similar VW.

Everything from the plastics to the trim has a quality light years away from the Skodas of even just a few years ago.

As for the driving experience, the Superb rides and handles like a very upmarket executive express. The 2litre turbo diesel engine is a beauty – quiet, refined and with a turn of speed that defies its bulk. It's also excellent on fuel economy – just over 50mpg.

And with prices starting at £18,550 for the 1.4 TSi and £20,120 for the 2litre diesel, it is superb value-for-money.

VERDICT: 9/10

ROAD TEST | VOLVO V50

YOU can't do a report on estates without Volvo cropping up somewhere.

But the Swedish firm have come up with something rather different with the V50.

It is the best looking Volvo estate ever – a smart mix of sporty and sophisticated. The downside is that it lacks the versatility and room you normally associate with a Volvo.

Boot space of 417 litres with the seats in place and 1,307 litres with them folded is below average but Volvo say if you need the extra cubic inches they have the V70 estate and the XC90 SUV.

Simply put, Volvo have joined the estate posers club where style comes before space. And over the years, Audi and BMW

formula that works. What the V50 does deliver, more than any other Volvo estate, is lots more miles per gallon, especially if you go for the ultra-efficient 1.6litre diesel DRiVe version. The engine and bodywork are tuned for maximum fuel economy and Volvo claim 74mpg.

I managed between 55 and 65mpg, depending on traffic conditions but eco-minded drivers should certainly get closer.

Inside, there is the usual first class cabin from Volvo. The V50 is a pleasant place to do long distances, especially if you are sitting in one of the two front seats.

With prices ranging from £19,495 to £25,515, Volvo have come up with a very sexy alternative estate.

But it's one where you will have to



Load space: 417 ltrs
Seat down: 1,307 ltrs
Price: £19,495

