

# In Gear



# STORMTROOPER

**Ford takes aim at hot hatch crown with Focus ST**

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## FIRST DRIVE: Vauxhall Vivaro Life Elite

## MPV is big on space and comfort – at a price



Gear SPEC SHEET	
<b>Vauxhall Vivaro Life Elite</b>	
Price:	£45,310 (as tested)
Engine:	2-litre, 4cyl turbo diesel
Power/torque:	148bhp/273lb ft
Transmission:	6-speed manual, front-wheel-drive
0-62mph:	12 seconds
Top speed:	105mph
Economy:	41.5mpg
CO2:	152g/Km



**DRIVING:** The engine line-up is restricted to a solitary 2.0-litre turbo diesel but, by 2021, will be joined by a 1.5-litre motor and a full electric version. You can feel the Vivaro Life Elite's weight through bends as the body is inclined to roll; numb controls do not help. Lofty seating position, large wing mirrors, and a 180-degree parking camera deliver good all-round visibility.

- + Loaded with creature comforts
- + Spacious and versatile interior
- + Third row of seats is a no-cost option

- Elite's commercial roots are evident
- Engine choice, for now, is limited
- Unladen ride is brittle

RATING  
4.0

## By Jason Craig

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**THE British car industry has been feeling decidedly sorry for itself lately. 1,700 highly-skilled jobs are set to go at Ford's Bridgend engine plant in Wales next autumn followed in 2021 by 7,000 workers at Honda's Swindon facility. Before that, the headcount at Jaguar Land Rover's Castle Bromwich, Solihul and Halewood sites will all be streamlined as part of £2.5bn in cost savings.**

The sector is not completely down and out, though, and Vauxhall looks to have the perfect tonic to keep hopes of a sustainable manufacturing base alive for the foreseeable future with this: the all-new Vivaro van. Available either as a Light Commercial Vehicle or passenger MPV capable of carrying 9 people, 1,250 jobs have been safeguarded at the firm's Luton facility in Bedfordshire.

Because of it a €114m cash injection that has seen the plant re-tooled over an 18-month period by parent owner Groupe PSA is, say Vauxhall hierarchy, a clear indication of its commitment to Britain.

This money was needed to ensure the site meets its 100,000 units-a-year target, and to properly manage the new technologies the Griffin-badged van carries. "We think of the previous Vivaro as being evolutionary – but this is revolutionary," explains Plant Director, Mike Wright. "Before, we had a very reliable van, a real industrial workhorse, but this one is modern and up-to-date."

Integral to this is the 'EMP2' platform. The Vivaro's bedrock is common to the Peugeot Traveller, Citroën SpaceTourer and Toyota Proace Verso, as are the panels, the fixtures and fittings used in their construction. For that reason, they all look much of a muchness from afar. Apart from the badge, the headlamps' outline and grille design are the other clues.

In more opulent 'Elite' guise, the Vivaro is a smart looking thing as it gets 17-inch alloys, privacy glass, and chrome brightwork. Dubbed "passenger carriers", 'Edition' vans cost less and their plain appearance and basic kit reflect this, from the steel rims to the unpainted rubbing strips.

The luxuries on Elite models are a clear nod to its "business and VIP" target audience, and those private customers with extended families "who need more space for leisure and adventure". Motorised dual sliding side doors make accessing the second and optional third row of chairs easy,

while an opening rear window eliminates the need to continually lift and then lower the huge tail-gate. This is particularly useful when you have no choice but to reverse into a tight space.

At 4956mm long and 2204mm wide the parking camera is going to be appreciated in situations like these, although why Vauxhall deemed a 7-inch touchscreen big enough remains a mystery. Although the screen is responsive, and has Apple CarPlay and Android Auto built-in, we found it maze-like as there are too many sub-menus – a common complaint with the French software.

## WHOLESALE

Compared to what went before it, the interior of the Mk3 is a world away from the outgoing model. Just like the outside, all the knobs, switches and instrumentation have been lifted across from PSA's other vans wholesale. Granted, there is a sea of hard and dull plastics where there should instead be tactile materials and soft padding. Even so, this is a real step change for the Vivaro, with silver on the dash, around the air vents and driver cowls welcome indeed.

Standard equipment is generous and comprises leather seats (the front two being heated and electrically powered), a head-up display, a panoramic glass roof, cruise control and keyless go.

Another advantage of the 'EMP2' platform is that it introduces the latest safety technologies to the Vivaro range, such as Lane Keep Assist, Lane Departure Warning, and Drowsiness Alert that warns the driver if they have been at the wheel for too long. There is also a camera located on the front of the vehicle that will apply the brakes if a pedestrian or cyclist crosses the van's path.

Perhaps most significant of all, however, is confirmation of a pure electric-powered offering in 2021. Until then, a 2.0-litre 'Turbo D' diesel powers the range. The 148bhp version is mated to a 6-speed manual gearbox, and the more powerful 178bhp version an 8-speed 'EAT8' automatic that is operated via a small rotary knob. In 'D' the transmission can be left alone for pleasing gear changes, or shifts can be made via the steering wheel paddles. Each engine's acceleration, top speed and refinement are where they need to be in this class. What we would say is that if you tend to cover high miles every year, and your daily journey requires you to switch between town streets, country roads and mind-numbing motorways by the hour, then the smart money is on the costlier set-up.

If you are in no great hurry the Vivaro is a fine companion but rush things and the motor turns rumbly and the softly sprung suspension struggles to get a handle on badly worn asphalt. However, with bums on seats, and luggage thrown in for good measure, the ride settles down.

By no means is this this sharpest MPV to drive but it isn't a complete disappointment, either. Despite lacking feel, the steering is light – as is

the manual's throw – but the brakes are spongy. Quick changes of movement, such as those needed at a roundabout, result in a fair bit of lollop, too.

As standard, the Vivaro is sold with a 2+3 seat formation, with Vauxhall giving buyers the choice of adding a final row of three seats for nothing. The model we tested had the 'premium seat' upgrade for the middle row which introduces two middle chairs that can be spun on their axis, and a fold away table. Perched on runners, the

seats glide effortlessly backwards and forwards into their preferred position. They can be also be folded flat or removed entirely to maximise available boot space; this ranges anywhere from 3.0 cubic metres to 3.9 cubic metres in the 'M' (Medium) version and 3.5 to 4.5 cubic metres in 'L' variants as they add 350mm of bodywork.

Space, then, is not in short supply for those being shuttled to their final destination. Neither is the array of pockets for papers and maps, cup holders, charging ports and anchor points.



**INTERIOR:** Dashboard is carried over from its Citroën and Peugeot siblings and so gets the same simple look and uncomplicated layout. Elite models come with loads of kit that includes leather seats and a 7-inch infotainment system. Oddly, given the vehicle's emphasis on luxury and user friendliness, drivers have to make do with a traditional handbrake that is awkward to reach.



**PRACTICALITY:** There's ample space for adult passengers in the Vivaro Life Elite. Five seats come as standard (2+3) but a third row of three seats can be installed at no cost. Our test model had the optional 2+2+3 configuration which introduces two swivelling chairs and a foldable table. Those wishing to maximise total boot volume can remove these entirely, although the seats are not the lightest to lift in or out. You will also need somewhere to store them away safely.

# KIA'S LATEST NEW CAR – THE 'XCEED' – IS NOW AVAILABLE TO ORDER AT TC AUTOS IN OMAGH



- Kia Xceed provides a sporty alternative to larger traditional SUV models
- One of the most high-tech cars in its class with a range of in-car features
- Comparable cabin and luggage space to an SUV in a more compact body
- Kia offers more choice in the C-segment than any other car manufacturer

The all-new Kia Xceed is the latest urban crossover utility vehicle (CUV) from Kia which combines compact SUV practicality with the sporty style of a hatchback. Orders of the Xceed are now available at TC Autos, Omagh with prices starting at £20,795.

The Xceed boasts a suite of advanced safety, connectivity and infotainment features, making it one of the most high-tech cars in the entire CUV class. Powered by a range of fast-revving, turbocharged engines, it is also one of the most efficient.

This new CUV also offers comparable levels of space for both occupants and luggage with a vibrant new 'Quantum Yellow' paint finish that is unique to the Xceed.

Ross Maguire, Dealer Principal at TC Autos Kia, comments: "The Kia Xceed addresses the growing desire for cars which offer more style and dynamism than an SUV, both in terms of the way a car looks and drives. Yet these customers don't want to lose the practicality that a larger car offers them. Our new CUV meets these needs, with a distinctive and modern design wrapped around a spacious, versatile body. Merging the strengths of both hatchback and SUV, the Kia Xceed offers something refreshing and different for our customers."

The Kia Xceed urban crossover will be manufactured at the brand's European production facility in Zilina,

Slovakia, alongside the Ceed five-door hatchback, Ceed Sportswagon, and ProCeed shooting brake. The newest member of the Ceed family will be sold as standard with Kia's industry-leading Seven-Year, 100,000-mile warranty.

Designed, developed and produced in Europe, the Kia Xceed is available to order at TC Autos now, with the first cars being delivered as we speak. For more information on UK pricing, line-up and how to pre-order the Kia Xceed please speak to an advisor at TC Autos, Omagh on 028 8224 3451.

## STYLE, SAFETY AND TECHNOLOGY A sporty, urban alternative to the traditional SUV

Stylish, expressive and modern in design, the Kia Xceed represents a sporty alternative to traditional SUVs. More athletic in appearance than its taller rivals, the new model offers something different to the other models in the Ceed range. The only body panels carried over from its five-door hatchback sibling are the front doors.

Laurent Boulay, General Manager Design Exterior for Kia Motors Europe, explains: "With the new Ceed family, we have managed to create four different cars which each meet a specific range of needs. None of

them are the same, and the Kia Xceed has a different stance to its siblings."

## An elevated driving position – and a sportier driving character to match

Carrying over the same contemporary cabin design of its Ceed stablemates, the new model retains the driver-oriented centre console. A lower hip point than a taller SUV, and raised ground clearance over a conventional hatchback, the Xceed provides drivers with a sportier driving position, allowing a better view of the road ahead.

"I think drivers will enjoy the Kia Xceed", comments Ralph Kluge, General Manager Design Interior, who masterminded the cabin of the new Ceed range. "It offers drivers a sporty character, combined with the elevated driving position of a crossover, so they can enjoy the best of both worlds."

A first for the Xceed is Kia's new 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment system with navigation and UVO Connect. The 'floating' infotainment system stands proud off the dashboard, with the lower portion of the instrument panel providing a set of touch-sensitive buttons, dials and switches. These control audio volume, heating and ventilation which allows you to change the cabin environment without taking your eyes of the road for longer than necessary.

For the arrival of the Kia Xceed, the brand has introduced its first fully-digital instrument cluster, a 12.3-inch high-resolution display which majors on clarity of information for drivers. "The Kia Xceed's digital instrument cluster and large central screen bring the Ceed into the modern world," says Kluge. "Together they enable a more lively and vibrant presentation of information to the driver and passengers."

## A colourful character

The new arrival is available in up to 7 different exterior colours in the UK, with the vibrant new shade, 'Quantum Yellow', available exclusively to customers of the new crossover.

Barbara Scheffler, Design Manager Colour & Trim for Kia Motors Europe, explains: "To me, it is important that we offer something that others do not dare to. Where other companies are seen as more conservative, Kia's 'power to surprise' opens up colour possibilities for us. 'Quantum Yellow' is the perfect match."

Dependant on specification level, unique to the Kia Xceed is a new yellow colour pack for the interior, with black upholstery contrasted with vibrant yellow stitching for seats and doors, yellow seat piping, and a blend of gloss black and metallic yellow highlights throughout the cabin.

**Call TC Autos now on 028 8224 3451 and be one of the first to test drive this fantastic new addition to the Kia range.**



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Fuel consumption in mpg (l/100km) for the model shown: Combined 42.8 (6.6), CO<sub>2</sub> emissions 142 g/km. MPG figures are official EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. The figures shown here are for limited comparison purposes; fuel consumption is tested using WLTP and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are NEDC equivalent. Only compare fuel consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> and electric range figures with other cars tested to the same technical procedures. For more information about WLTP please refer to [kia.com/uk](http://kia.com/uk). Model shown: All-New Kia Xceed 'First Edition' 1.4 T-GDi 138bhp 6-speed manual ISG at £28,095 including premium Quantum Yellow paint. All-New Kia Xceed range available from £20,795. Specification varies across the range and is subject to change without notice. \*£1,250 towards your Personal Contract Purchase Deposit on All-New Kia Xceed. Offer available on purchase of an All-New Kia Xceed in the United Kingdom between 01.09.2019 – 30.09.2019. Private customer registrations only, excluding Personal Contract Hire. Finance T&Cs apply. Subject to status. 18s or over. Guarantee may be required. Kia Finance RH2 9AQ. 7 year / 100,000 mile manufacturer's warranty. T C Autos Ltd trading as TC Autos are a credit broker (not a lender) for the purposes of this financial promotion and can introduce you to a limited number of carefully selected finance providers and may receive a commission from them for the introduction.

## COVER CAR: Ford Focus ST

# Has Ford finally broken GTI's stranglehold?

## In Gear SPEC SHEET

<b>Ford Focus ST</b>	
<b>Price:</b>	£32,245 (as tested)
<b>Engine:</b>	2.3-litre, 4cyl turbo petrol
<b>Power/torque:</b>	276bhp/310lb ft
<b>Transmission:</b>	6-speed manual, front-wheel-drive
<b>0-62mph:</b>	5.7seconds
<b>Top speed:</b>	155mph
<b>Economy:</b>	34.4mpg
<b>CO2:</b>	179g/Km



**STYLING:** ST is similar in appearance to the mildly sporty ST-Line version of the Focus. Setting it apart is a new grille and lower apron design, 19-inch 'Magnetite' alloy wheels, twin exhausts and adaptive LED headlights. Red brake calipers and Performance Blue paint are two options.



**DRIVING:** Engine in Focus ST is one of the strongest in this class thanks to 310lb ft of torque, so mid-range acceleration is competitive (0-60mph in 5.7 seconds). Three driver modes are standard; the Performance Pack introduces Track for sweeter throttle responses and auto blipping. Petrol STs are equipped with an e-diff that can switch 100% of torque across the front axle for maximum corner grip and Continuously Controlled Damping for a pliant ride.

By Jason Craig

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**IN** the hot hatch world some nameplates have struggled to live up to the hype. Arguably the biggest hard luck story is the Focus ST – a car that has fallen short in previous attempts to usurp the Golf GTI. Whereas the German car ticks all the boxes, the ST has only managed to excel in a few key areas.

Needless to say the fourth instalment of the ST has its work well and truly cut out at a time when there is so much choice, with each rival as accomplished as the next. Recently, the envelope was pushed further by Mercedes as it introduced the absurd AMG A35 and Renault Sport has added more driver-focussed Sport and Cup versions to its growing Megane line-up.

And we cannot forget the small matter of the Focus's fun-filled Fiesta ST baby brother – a car so good and so widely acclaimed it has left quite a few people asking why Ford has struggled to replicate that formula on a bigger scale. So has the firm finally managed to find its A-game?

The first step engineers have taken is to give the Focus ST more power by employing the same 2.3-litre turbo petrol engine used in the Mustang. Tuned to develop 276bhp, the EcoBoost unit adopts twin-scroll turbocharging and is among the very first mainstream models to get anti-lag technology. Making its debut on Ford's 216mph GT supercar, the latter keeps the throttle open after the driver lifts off the accelerator to maintain pressure to the turbo.

The add-ons combine to give the all-aluminium motor identical in-gear performance as the 315bhp, four-wheel-drive Focus RS in quarter-mile tests. New, too, is a rev-matching function for downshifts, Continuously Controlled Damping, an Electronic Limited-Slip Differential sourced from Borg Warner that can send 100% torque to one wheel in corners, and a 7-speed automatic that should land here in November.

Before we assess how the Focus ST drives and performs, it is probably worth taking a look at what visual changes £31,995 amounts to. A bodykit made up of 'air-curtain inlets' on the front bumper and a subtle rear diffuser work in tandem with the roof-mounted spoiler and shallow side skirts to channel air around the body for stability and cooling purposes. For good measure there are 19-inch alloy wheels, RS-inspired twin exhausts for petrol models and ST badging.



**INTERIOR:** Racy Recaro seats are superbly detailed and are exclusive to the ST as is the leather steering wheel and scuff plates. Generous spec list includes an 8-inch touchscreen with sat-nav, a 10-speaker sound system and a rear view parking camera.

As opposed to three trim levels seen on previous STs, this box fresh version is available in just one. There are decent options available for those who find they have cash burning a hole in their trouser pocket. Of these, the 'Performance Pack' is the one that introduces something worthwhile by way of a fourth drive mode (Track), launch control, a gear change indicator and red brake calipers. Two hues have also been added to the ST's palette: Orange Fury and Ford Performance Blue.

Right across the board Ford is making some pretty bold statements about this car, one of note being that every one built is guaranteed to be "manufactured with best-ever craftsmanship and quality" following a £544m refurb of its Saarlouis factory at the French/German border.

Once you have found the perfect driving position – a job that is both quick and easy as the part-leather trimmed Recaro front chairs are electrically adjustable – you begin to notice how the cabin has been spruced up. Top of the list are the snug seats, a flat-bottomed leather steering wheel, aluminium gearknob, metal ST sill plates and soft grey decorative stitching.

### TECHNOLOGY

Nav, media and phone functions are all operated via a bright eight-inch touchscreen. On top of that there is a B&O audio system, electronic climate control, keyless start and stop, a rear parking camera, adaptive LED headlights, adaptive cruise control and automatic emergency braking.

An inflated price tag does not secure any more room for those in the front or the back which, by class standards, is acceptable, while the 375-litre boot is similar to what rivals can pack in. Blending everyday sports thrills with practicality is the main

attraction of owning and running a Focus ST and while it may not lead the way in terms of space, four adults can travel in relative ease.

Fire up the motor, engage first and move off and the Focus ST starts to reveal the reason why punters are going to view the car in a whole new light. Ford says buyers want to be able to tap into the car's maximum potential at the touch of a button every time they climb inside, which explains the 'S' key on the steering wheel. Tap this and the throttle's response sharpens, the engine braking is stronger and the exhaust's note switches from a low-pitched drone to cracks and pops as you rush towards the red line. Sound augmentation harks back to the five-pot engine in the Mk3, meanwhile.

The 2.3-litre engine isn't without its faults. Below 2,000rpm there really is nothing worth talking about. Instead, the excitement comes to the fore between 2,500rpm and 4,000rpm. Keep the engine singing in this small window and the opportunities to savour all the available torque are endless.

Another perk of the Performance Pack is the addition of auto-blipping – a trick Honda made popular with the savage Civic Type R. It works brilliantly on the Japanese car and does so here. Those who love to heel-and-toe will be pleased to learn that it can be switched off.

However, neither the Civic nor the Golf GTI, Renault Sport Megane or the AMG A35 served as the benchmark when it came to developing and fine tuning the fifth-generation Focus ST. Rather, the Fiesta ST was the yard stick. Keen turn-in, agile handling and a chuckable chassis are what set it apart and the good news is those traits are alive and kicking in this faster and maturer offering.

The electric steering has been sharpened by

15% - and you can tell. On stretches of narrow, twisty Cumbrian Tarmac in the wet and dry we could not find fault. It was bang on the money for weightiness and feel so you know exactly what the front two driven wheels are doing. Shod in bespoke Michelin Pilot Sport 4S rubber, the darty nose digs in hard and allows you to scythe through corners and bends without fear of understeer. Only if you are overly optimistic is there the threat of that. Detected, the e-diff sparks into life and helps rescue the situation.

Ford Performance boffins have worked wonders on the brakes, too, as these are reassuringly powerful. Shortening the gearlever's throw has also contributed to a positive, snickety action. So far so good then, but now the litmus test: how the Focus ST rides. To pay the car the nicest possible compliment it has all the characteristics of the Fiesta ST, however the chassis is a tad more forgiving.

A lowered ride height and beefed up dampers haven't come at the expense of comfort, either, as the standard variable system is not easily ruffled by lumpier asphalt or rougher surfaces. In 'Sport' there is a noticeably harder edge at lower speeds, though things settle down nicely at a cruise where the benefit of a multi-link rear suspension becomes apparent.

Over to you, GTI.

**+ The most rounded Focus ST yet**  
**+ Strong acceleration and in-gear punch**  
**+ Class-leading safety and media tech**

**- Demure looks won't turn many heads**  
**- Cabin near identical to regular Focus**  
**- Price could be a sticking point**

RATING  
 **4.5**

# In Gear DIRECTORY

## The new Fiat Panda Trussardi limited edition revealed

Fiat has partnered with the well-known Italian Fashion house to create the stylish 'Panda Trussardi'. This limited edition brings together two brands that have made history in their respective industries, showcasing the best of Italy.

Fiat Centro Stile and Trussardi designers collaborated on the design and accessories to reflect the personality of Panda and the Italian fashion house. The Trussardi Greyhound symbol can be seen on the rear quarter light, in the centre of the alloy wheels and on the side mouldings while other exclusive style details, including the black roof bars, mirror caps, 15-inch alloy wheels and the skid plate further set this model apart. The model sports a striking Caffè Italiano Brown colour, with either a matt or metallic finish, as well as being available in a choice of other colours.

Inside, Trussardi lettering embellishes the exclusive mats, seat belts, door panel inserts as well as the logo appearing on the seat upholstery. The

black techno-leather seat inserts are embellished with brown stitching while the dashboard also sports a new Caffè Italiano Brown finish. The Trussardi logo takes pride of place in the centre of the steering wheel, the first time in the history of Panda that this has ever happened

The Panda Trussardi is available with a 69hp 1.2-litre petrol engine and 5-speed manual gearbox. The Panda Trussardi also offers City Brake Control as an option. The City Brake system detects obstacles in front of the car and automatically applies the brakes if the driver does not respond when the vehicle is travelling under 18mph.

"Panda can boast 39 years of success and has been the most popular car in Italy for six years. It has been the best-selling city car in Europe since 2003. 7.5 million units have been sold, of which five million are still on the road," said Olivier François, president of Fiat brand. "It is also a record-breaker. It was the first 4WD city car, the first small car to fit

an automatic transmission, the first urban SUV and the first car to climb Mount Everest. Today, we have the first 'luxury Panda', the Panda Trussardi".

"Trussardi was the first Italian brand to take fashion to the general public by organising fashion shows in city squares and in locations close to the people", commented Tomaso Trussardi, CEO of Trussardi. "We have always created products with a unique design and our brand vision is inclusive and multifaceted. Today, Fiat Panda is wearing the Trussardi style and turning itself into a contemporary and functional car with great attention to detail. I am very satisfied with this collaboration and thank the Fiat team for having believed in this project with us", he added.

Panda Trussardi features in the music video of Ava Max's new single "Torn", in the video, the protagonist played by singer Ava Max steals the Trussardi-branded seat belt.

The new Panda Trussardi starts from £14,060 and



is available in showrooms now.

For more information about the Fiat range visit [www.fiat.co.uk](http://www.fiat.co.uk) or to locate your nearest Fiat retailer visit [www.fiat.co.uk/retailers](http://www.fiat.co.uk/retailers).

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## FIRST DRIVE: BMW 330d M Sport

# Why sharp suited German saloon takes some beating



## Gear SPEC SHEET

<b>BMW 330d M Sport</b>	
<b>Price:</b>	£51,605 (as tested)
<b>Engine:</b>	3-litre, 6cyl turbo diesel
<b>Power/torque:</b>	262bhp/428lb ft
<b>Transmission:</b>	8-speed automatic, rear-wheel-drive
<b>0-60mph:</b>	5.5 seconds
<b>Top speed:</b>	149mph
<b>Economy:</b>	47.9mpg
<b>CO2:</b>	157g/Km



**STYLING:** Mk7 3 Series ushers in a fresh design philosophy for German brand, although overall shape and look of new saloon bears a close resemblance to its predecessor. 19-inch rims, blue brake callipers and M badging on our test car are all cost options as is active sports suspension and rear differential.



By Jason Craig

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**THINK BMW and chances are the 3 Series is what probably springs to mind. As the rest of the Bavarian company's model line-up has evolved, the four-door has been a constant since the mid-Seventies, striking the perfect balance between real world performance, a fun drive and roomy interior.**

When it comes to broadening the appeal of the compact executive saloon BMW has real form. Despite the emergence of SUVs, the previous 3 Series – even in its dying days – outsold the X3 and X4 by 15,000 units a year, so is this trend about to continue? Not if rivals can help it.

Mercedes and Jaguar have not been sitting on their hands. In recent months both have rolled out revitalised versions of the C-Class and XE respectively. Not to be outdone, Audi has gone and placed its big-selling A4 under the scalpel, with the nip and tuck extending to the inside.

They are facelifts, mind, whereas the latest 3 Series is new from the ground up. Some fans of the car might have expected the redesign to bear bolder styling but being recognisable as a 3 Series was the end goal for Stephan Horn, the man who spearheaded the entire project.

An evolutionary approach has been deemed a suitable compromise to guarantee continued success for the "heartbeat of the brand", and the G20-generation harbours many of the visual cues from before. A larger kidney grille, moody LED headlights and L-shaped split tail-lights are



**PRACTICALITY:** Sitting on a longer and wider wheelbase means the 3 Series is roomier in the rear, but hump in-between the outer two footwells does restrict foot space for those in the middle. 480-litre boot is spacious, has a sensible square shape and is free of intrusions. Load lip is deep, however.

retained, while eagle-eyed readers will note the rise in the number of sharp lines and creases.

Under its 'Precision and Poetry' design language, BMW says buyers should no longer confuse the 3 Series for its 5 Series brother. Visually they may be different, but underneath they are a mirror image as both are built on the brand's 'CLAR' architecture. Despite being 85mm longer (4709mm) and 16mm wider (1,827mm), the body is now 50% stiffer and a whole 55kg lighter even though there is more kit than ever. A slippery shape and active aero parts also help it to cut through the air, a drag coefficient of 0.23 translating into better returns at the pumps.

Three specifications are offered and between them 'M-Sport' in 330d guise has the show to match the go. Alloy wheels are joined by a sculpted bodykit, 'M' badging and gloss black trim.

Dealers offer a number of packs and if you choose every one it adds £7,000 to the list price. Our car had all five, but the 'M Sport Plus' bundle makes most sense financially as it introduces 19-inch rims, a meaty braking system, rear differential and an active suspension.

The good news continues inside where change is more apparent and a leather steering wheel, heated seats, and textured aluminium is the order of the day. Germanic in its construction, the blue-stitched dash seamlessly incorporates the latest iDrive 7.0 infotainment system that is operated by touch or via the familiar iDrive wheel on the lower half of the angled console.

Users can personalise the 10.25-inch display in the same way you would on a smartphone by lifting 'tiles' and grouping these together. Via the voice command-led 'Intelligent Personal Assistant' you can adjust the cabin temperature, flick between stations or enter details into the sat-nav. To ensure the system is bang up-to-date, software patches are sent over-the-air.

The iDrive system is joined by a crystal clear 12.3-inch driver display. We have no complaints about the way it looks, although it lacks the same configurability of the class benchmark – Audi's Virtual Cockpit. Still, the fascia, as with the dash, is beautifully presented and bursting with colour. Entry-level cars miss out on the tech and get less fanciful analogue dials instead.

Prices have risen by a couple of grand on before, but BMW says this has been negated by the standard equipment list. Adaptive LED headlights and a reversing camera, ambient lighting for the cockpit and practical driver's tools such as cruise control and Park Assist, all feature, and thanks to thickened glass, travel noise is well suppressed for a truly relaxing environment.

A creamy six-cylinder turbo diesel that has

enough torque to turn the planet on its axis, not to mention the brilliantly calibrated 8-speed automatic, play a telling part where refinement is concerned. They are a seamless match irrespective of whether you are in 'Comfort', 'Sport' or 'Sport+' drive modes. The second most potent engine in the range – for now – does not lack for get-up-and-go as 62mph arrives in 5.5 seconds. Keep your foot on the accelerator and the motor's urgency continues beyond 3,500rpm without breaking as much as a sweat.

Spend even a brief spell at the wheel and you begin to believe the hyperbole about a renewed focus on driving dynamics. How so? Every single petrol and diesel derivative has had their springs and dampers individually tailored to maximise the 50:50 weight distribution.

Riding on the larger alloys didn't deteriorate our car's ride too much as the springs executed their job of gliding over unforgiving roads and managing cambers and curves, twists and turns with the greatest of ease. Body control is sublime and the 'Joy of driving' mantra this new 3 Series is said to encapsulate really does show. The level of dynamic ability is simply incredible.

Having a limited-slip differential thrown into the mix certainly helps stability, not forgetting a wider track front and rear, but that is not to

say you are glued to the road and can't have fun. Letting the side down is electrically-assisted steering that is too light when in 'Comfort' and full of unnecessary weight in 'Sport'. In this respect, however, the 3 Series is not alone.

Three adult passengers seated across the bench in the rear are sure to applaud the versatile ride and how the 3 Series is just as accommodating thanks to generous amounts of shoulder, head and leg room. Separate climate control settings, charge points for smartphones, a fold-down centre arm-rest with cup holders, map pockets and deep door bins add to the experience. No gains have been made in respect of boot size this time around and so it remains fixed at 480-litres.

- + Diesel is both fast and frugal
- + Infotainment easily the best in class
- + Roomier and more practical inside

- List price is on the expensive side
- Many options not sold individually
- Styling too similar to the Mk6

RATING  
**4.5**



**INTERIOR:** Colour trimmed sports seats and seatbelts are among the details introduced as part of the 'M Sport Plus Pack'. Dash layout is sleek and simple and is shaped around BMW's new 'iDrive 7.0' media technology that can be explored via rotary dial (inset). Build is exemplary and material quality high.



## FIRST DRIVE: Volkswagen Passat GTE

# More power and bigger battery for hybrid saloon



## in Gear SPEC SHEET

### Volkswagen Passat GTE

Price:	£40,275 (as tested)
Engine:	1.4-litre, 4cyl petrol-electric hybrid
Power/torque:	215bhp/295lb ft
Transmission:	6-speed automatic, front-wheel-drive
0-62mph:	7.4 seconds
Top speed:	138mph
Economy:	201.7mpg
CO2:	36g/Km



## By Jason Craig

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 @journojason

**GTE is one of the newer sub-brands Volkswagen has introduced in recent years. Initially, the Golf was the flag bearer for the sporting hybrid moniker before the Passat joined the fold and really changed perceptions amongst private and business owners about the merits of hybrid ownership.**

When it first hit the market back in 2016, one in every ten Passat saloon and estate cars sold was a GTE. Just three years later and the German company predicts that this plug-in will account for a quarter of all showroom deals.

This clean technology is available in either 'GTE' or table-topping 'GTE Advance' trim levels which make up a model portfolio that has been streamlined as part of this mid-cycle refresh. Others include 'SE' and 'SE Nav', techie 'SEL', stylish 'R-Line' and beefed-up 'Alltrack' versions.

The key talking point for the Passat GTE comes in the form of the battery which increases in capacity from 9.9 kWh to 13.0 kWh, pushing the electric-only range up from 31 to 43 miles – a figure that should be sufficient for most daily commutes. As well as having the engine to top it up on the move, the battery can be replenished via an on-street charger or domestic source.

Going from empty to full using a 3.6 kW supply should not take any longer than four hours – a process that is simple to execute as it comprises

two parts. A compartment in the boot has been set aside to store the cable, while the socket that accepts the plug is discreetly hidden behind a pop open panel on the Passat's grille. Utilising the battery's reserves is easy as well.

A 'Mode' button located to the left of the gear-lever allows drivers to flick between hybrid or pure electric depending on the situation, whether parked up or on the move. The switchover between the two is seamless, immediate and, perhaps most importantly of all, unobtrusive.

To make the most of the battery's reserves the sat-nav has been calibrated to suggest a route that allows you to go full electric in towns and cities before replenishing this when journey speeds are constant.

When the 1.4-litre turbo petrol engine is dormant you have occasional road and wind noise for company in the cabin. Once it bursts into life you really have to strain your ears to hear it at work. Acceleration won't set pulses racing but given the size and weight of the Passat the 154bhp motor has enough going for it. And in a nod to the car's GT credentials a third button branded 'GTE' blends engine and battery power for noticeably livelier mid-range acceleration.

As with most hybrid cars on the market, the GTE runs an automatic transmission. The dual-clutch, 6-speed DSG set-up is Volkswagen's own creation and it works a treat in 'D'. When you push the gear-lever to 'S' there is no waiting around when you tap the steering wheel paddles.

This is true on the motorway where the Passat wafts you along in unbridled comfort – the very place where the majority of these four-door cars are going to spend their working lives.

## FLUMMOXED

The story is very different cross-country, however, as the softly sprung suspension is too easily flummoxed. It fails to absorb the blow of common road imperfections in the way a 3 Series can, and if the surface changes from smooth to rough without warning the ride turns crashy.

Rather than opting for the £300 18s on our test car, we suspect if you stick with the factory fit 17-inch wheels this might go some way to remedying a fair few of the ride problems outlined.

In either case, there is little body movement as you peel off at a roundabout, or emerge the other side of an unseen corner at speed. Crisp steering that is quick and direct pleases as well but the brakes are too spongy and the regenerative braking process too harsh and intrusive.

If you meet the Passat GTE on your travels no doubt the impression it will create is a positive one, especially in 'Pure White' (£370). Specific to GTE are the blue brake callipers, blue piping along the front grille and subtle badging. For an extra couple of grand GTE Advance gets the bigger 18-inch 'Monterrey' polished alloy wheels as standard and dazzling Matrix LED lights.

This classy look is carried over onto the inside of the Passat where Volkswagen's typically high levels of fit and finish are evident. Some aspects of the interior are starting to show their age and the decision to install analogue dials instead of the 12.3-inch 'Digital Cockpit' to the GTE appears at odds with the cutting-edge message Volkswagen is trying to convey to customers.

Instead, this and the 'Pro' navigation are reserved for GTE Advance.

For the money equipment levels are where they ought to be and includes leather upholstery,

**STYLING:** Blue marks out the Passat GTE's hybrid credentials, with all four brake callipers and the badging on either flank finished in that shade. The model is also identifiable by simple GTE lettering on the grille and boot lid. 18-inch alloy wheels are chic but can hurt ride quality and comfort.

dual-zone electronic climate control, an 8-inch multimedia display and 'Wireless App Connect' which allows compatible smartphones to be linked and charged without the need for a cable.

Meanwhile, 'Travel Assist' – technology that can control the car in a semi-autonomous mode by combining Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Assist – is being rolled out across the line-up.

Whichever saloon you end up going for the Passat is an accommodating and well-executed car as far as passenger space and storage are concerned. The roofline is at just the right height meaning tall people won't have to contend with their hair brushing against the headlining.

Three adults seated side by side on the rear bench should be generally happy with how much shoulder room they have. Leg room is generous and foot space adequate despite a prominent hump in the floor between the driver and passenger seats. There are lots of cubbies to store items and the boot is large enough for a saloon at 586-litres – roughly 100-litres more than a 3 Series.

If you need to lower the back seats to increase the load area this is performed by pulling one or both of the two t-shaped handles inside the boot here you will also find a handy 12v power socket. Not only is this handy but it is sure to avoid quite a lot of stress as it eliminates the need to reach into the back of the car every time.

One blot on the square boot's copybook is the load lip. At three inches high it can get in the way when loading or unloading bulky items as the opening itself is not the biggest – a common complaint with saloons.



**CHARGING:** The charging socket to link the cable up to is concealed by a flap in the front grille. New 13.0 kWh battery offers a greater range in electric only mode, up from 31 miles to 43 – a 40% improvement. Switching between petrol, hybrid and electric takes one push of a button (inset).



**INTERIOR:** The main talking point on the inside is the Passat's multimedia system which runs Volkswagen's latest 'MIB3' software. It closely resembles a smartphone in its appearance and how it functions. GTE models do without a digital instrument binnacle but they do get blue ambient lighting, 'Vienna' leather seats, two-zone climate control and safety aids such as 'Travel Assist'. Overall quality is as high as you would expect.

- + Superior electric-only range
- + Passat's looks are understated
- + New list price is cheaper

- Digital binnacle isn't standard
- Hit and miss ride and handling
- 'Advance' adds £2,500 over 'GTE'

RATING  
**4.0**

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## FIRST DRIVE: Mini Cooper S 60 Years Edition

# Mini celebrates anniversary with special edition model



## Gear SPEC SHEET

<b>Mini Cooper S 60 Years Edition</b>	
<b>Price:</b>	£30,025 (as tested)
<b>Engine:</b>	2-litre, 4cyl turbo petrol
<b>Power/torque:</b>	189bhp/207lb ft
<b>Transmission:</b>	8-speed automatic, front-wheel-drive
<b>0-62mph:</b>	6.7 seconds
<b>Top speed:</b>	145mph
<b>Economy:</b>	43.5mpg
<b>CO2:</b>	150g/Km

**STYLING:** Available only in British Racing Green, 60 Years Edition cars have rally-style fog lights, unique racing stripes and badging, and 17-inch alloys. Based on the Cooper S hatch means the car shares many of its styling cues, from the central bonnet scoop, twin exhaust pipes and Union flag tail-lamps.

**DRIVING:** Sharp handling, precise body control and a tuneful engine combine to deliver a smile-a-mile driving experience. Purists will pine for a manual but 8-speed Steptronic on 60 Years Edition will surprise as it quickly responds to throttle inputs and changes gears instantly.

## By Jason Craig

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 @journojason

**A BRITISH motoring icon turns 60 this year. To celebrate the milestone, Mini has launched the latest in a long line of special edition models. But just how exclusive is this new one? Well, only five hundred 'Cooper S 60 Years Edition' examples are destined for the UK and Ireland.**

It is going to be a rare sight on our roads then, but not nearly as rare as the John Cooper Works World Championship 50 from a decade ago. Two hundred and fifty were assembled at Mini's Cowley plant in Oxford as homage to the nameplate's most legendary tuner – John Cooper.

Still, the car featured here is a big deal, or so Public Relations bosses at Mini would lead us to believe, and is easily identifiable by the British Racing Green paint, gloss black roof and matching wing mirror caps. Racing stripes on the bonnet with a 60 Year motif on the passenger's side, new badges for the flanks, and 17-inch two-tone alloy wheels achieve their goal of creating added visual interest.

Save for a pair of rally-lookalike driving pods

that are bolted onto the front grille, the bodykit from the regular Cooper S are all stock items. So, LED headlamps and LED rear light clusters with their Union Jack pattern, and a bonnet with an air scoop to keep the turbo cool, remain.

There is no scope for buyers to add a personal touch – something Mini is renowned for the world over. Is that a bad thing? Possibly. Then again, designers could well be on to something here. Whereas the Cooper S is perceived by some people as a car aimed squarely at younger drivers, the 60 Years Edition is unashamedly more constrained, but also more sophisticated.

A point in case are those exclusive 'Dark Cacao' leather chairs. Stitch finished and brimming with detail, they are supportive and have the right amount of adjustment. They also soften the blow of the £30,000 asking price.

Standard equipment includes the larger 8.8-inch multimedia display with satellite navigation and Apple CarPlay. On top of that you get a wireless charging pad, a parking camera and automatic lights.

Missing, however, is a digitised driver display. As previewed by the forthcoming Mini Electric such a feature does exist but – annoyingly – appears not to have been finalised in time for the 60 Years Edition. That aside, the Mini is loaded with the creature comforts buyers would expect.

Another area where this city-sized hatchback excels is cabin comfort and quality. Below eye

level you are going to find scratchy surfaces, yet fit and finish is still ahead of the Volkswagen Polo GTI and Ford Fiesta ST. Ahead, yes, but the mainstream posse are quickly closing the gap.

### REWARD

Mini has also got the driving experience right – the stuff that matters in this class. As the owner of the current generation Ford Fiesta ST I wanted to know if it rewards in the same way as my daily runaround. Having an extra cylinder and nearly 500cc more at its disposal than the Blue Oval's big-selling supermini cannot prevent the Mini from losing out in the power stakes (189bhp versus 197bhp). It shades the Fiesta for top speed on paper (145mph against 144mph) but requires an extra two tenths of a second to reach 62mph from a standing start.

Power from the 2.0-litre turbo petrol remains capped here and this is relayed to the front wheels via a swift-shifting eight-speed automatic. Under the stricter WLTP test rather than the defunct NEDC emissions test, the car can return 43.5mpg. Again, similar to the Fiesta ST.

The pair are both a hoot to drive fast, and in the case of the Mini the motor is more tuneful and pleasing on the ear. Feed the throttle in gently and you might be left feeling a little cold and disappointed, but stomp on the accelerator and the forward rush is matched by a bassy note from the centrally mounted chrome exhausts that pop and crackle as you ease off the gas and climb

down the gears. This is a treat in itself because the wastegate's sound is not too dissimilar to an angry squirrel giving itself a good talking to just feet from where you are seated.

As I discovered, being so small has obvious advantages, particularly on a narrow stretch of Tarmac that weaves, has dips and crests. Whether table top smooth or peppered with cracks and holes, you can attack the road ahead with maximum commitment. The chassis lacks the ST's final degree of polish but the experience is still one to behold and front end grip from the Pirellis is strong so you to track a constant line through any number of wide, sweeping bends.

You do tend to find yourself asking for an ounce more feedback from the car's steering. The picture improves the harder you push and the brakes do a fine job of gathering everything up should you run out of road – or natural talent.

A small footprint does have its drawbacks, though, and this is most keenly felt when it comes to interior packaging. The front two door bins and the glovebox are laughably teeny, and the map pockets on the back of the driver and passenger seats strike you as being a token gesture. Those after a big boot might be better served looking elsewhere as the Mini's is filled by two carry on suitcases. The ability to raise and lower the boot floor warrants a mention though.

The Mini does deceive as a strict 2+2 however. There is ample head and leg room for those travelling around in the back. The notion of a third person sitting in the centre of the rear bench is an idea probably best avoided unless they are a toddler or small child. Apart from the inevitability of having to rub shoulders the entire journey with those either side of them, they also have to contend with a hefty hump that acts as a divide for the outer two seats. Cue the dreaded pins and needles.



**INTERIOR:** Seats are exclusive to latest limited run model. Upholstered in leather, they get an eclectic mix of detail. Equipment list is comprehensive and includes an 8.8-inch touchscreen - which is operated via a small rotary controller - wireless charging and a reversing camera.

- + Flexible and characterful engine
- + Playful chassis, sporty dynamics
- + Refined and well-built cabin

- Rear seat/boot space is tight
- Manual transmission not available
- Buyers cannot personalise their car

RATING  
**4.0**



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**2016** BMW 420D M Sport Coupe 190BHP Auto, grey metallic, black leather, FSH, Professional media, only £30 road tax, 71,000 miles..... **£15,950**

**2016** Kia Sportage 1.7CRDI 2 in dark grey metallic, 32000 miles FSH, Sat/Nav, Balance of Kia 7 year warranty and only £30 road tax **£12,750**

**2016** Nissan Pulsar Visa 1.5 DCI in white, only 13,000 miles with full service history, Zero road tax and excellent MPG..... **£8,850**

**2016** Volkswagen Tiguan 2.0TDI Match Edition in white, 26,000 miles, one owner car, FSH on this very nice low mileage Tiguan..... **£13,950**

**2016** Seat Leon FR 2.0TDI 184BHP Technology, Grey metallic, Sat/Nav, 52,000 miles, only £30 road tax, just serviced..... **£10795**

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## FIRST DRIVE: Mitsubishi L200 Barbarian X

## Revamped pick-up gets bold look, new engine and tech



## Gear SPEC SHEET

<b>Mitsubishi L200 Barbarian X</b>	
<b>Price:</b>	£32,200 (as tested)
<b>Engine:</b>	2.3-litre, 4cyl turbo diesel
<b>Power/torque:</b>	148bhp/295lb ft
<b>Transmission:</b>	6-speed automatic, four-wheel-drive
<b>0-62mph:</b>	TBC
<b>Top speed:</b>	106mph
<b>Economy:</b>	29.1mpg
<b>CO2:</b>	206g/Km



**STYLING:** Series 6 gets an uncompromising look that consists of a bold face and squared-off wheel-arches, deep bumpers and 18-inch alloy wheels. Barbarian X L200s are identifiable by decals for the rear doors and tail-gate. Other changes see the introduction of four new colours, from 'White Diamond' and 'Graphite Grey' to 'Red Diamond' and 'Sunflare Orange'.



**PRACTICALITY:** The L200 can tow three-and-a-half tonne with the chassis capable of carrying 550kg of ballast in the load bed at the same time. Narrow dimensions and a turning circle of 11.8m is the best in class and makes the Japanese truck easy to manoeuvre in tight situations. Other changes see the introduction of bigger 320mm disc brakes at the front for superior stopping power. Some Series 5 styling accessories are compatible with the Series 6.

## By Jason Craig

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 @journojason

**THE UK pick-up market remains in rude health during these turbulent times and that stability has been driven by models such as the Mitsubishi L200. The last four years have been kind to the mud-plugger in the face of renewed opposition but the time has arrived for a new model.**

Touted as the most capable pick-up the Japanese manufacturer has ever built, it is hoped the new L200 can grow the 4.7m that have already been sold since the Seventies. The home market has been a key contributor to that number with one in three Mitsubishi's being a truck. To ensure on-going demand is met, thirty eight L200s will roll off the assembly line every hour in Thailand.

Mitsubishi says 2,400 changes have been applied to the sixth-generation L200 which is already pounding construction sites, towing animal boxes and transversing mountainous regions on the other side of the world where it has been on sale now for a year. British buyers have had to wait a little longer to experience the up-dates so the big question is: has it been worth it?

L200 owners know what they want and what

they don't and feedback from them has revealed that the previous model's friendly, soft persona struggled to convey the kind of message they wanted. For this very reason the L200's demeanour has been toughened up; there is going to be no chance of mistaking the old with the new as the front styling changes are so extreme.

Resembling a character from a Transformers movie the chiselled nose is inspired by the firm's 'Dynamic Shield' – a look common to the rest of the SUV range, from the Eclipse Cross to the Shogun Sport. Incidentally, the latter utilises the L200 platform, hence it looks very similar.

Slimmer LED headlamps mounted 700mm from the ground to improve wading performance, and vertically stacked driving lights that sit at the front of pronounced and squared-off wheel-arches, portray a sense of masculinity. Small details also matter such as the clamshell bonnet; it has been elevated by 40mm to help when positioning the L200 on the road. And as part of the transformation a simpler arrangement has been preferred for the boxier tail-lights.

Smart chrome brightwork for the grille and mirror caps, chunky 18-inch alloys, a working skid plate, deep side steps that make accessing the cabin easier, and a reprofiled tail-gate that can be lowered to 90 degrees so that it acts as a handy ledge, are all a case of business as usual.

Measuring 1,520mm long and 1,470mm wide the load bed is unchanged – and there is a very

good reason for that. Accessories sold with the pre-facelift L200, such as bed covers and hard tops, are compatible with the latest version, something owners of the Series 5 making the step across are sure to welcome.

## PULLING POWER

Providing the pulling power this time around is a 2.3-litre four-cylinder turbo diesel. Euro 6d-compliant, it has 148bhp and 295lb ft of torque. Although towing capabilities are the same at three-and-a-half tonne the payload is up slightly at 1,080kg. That is still some way behind the benchmark vehicles: the Ford Ranger can carry 1,217kg and the Volkswagen Amarok 1,154kg.

The previous diesel was smooth and torquey and you get more of the same with the smaller motor. Despite its two-tonne kerb weight, arriving at motorway speeds in the L200 is easy as there is bags of low-end grunt. Efficiency ranges between 29.1mpg if paired to the new six-speed automatic and 32.1mpg for the six-speed manual. On tickover the motor is agricultural and it quickly turns coarse in spite of the new transmission slurring gears at the right moment.

Through towns and in slow-moving traffic it does struggle to select a lower ratio and stick with it, however, so unless your throttle inputs are deft or your speed is constant you are probably going to override the system by reaching for the paddles directly behind the steering wheel.

To comply with ever strict regulations a huge 21-litre AdBlue tank has been introduced. Those put off by the idea of having to top this up needn't worry as refills happen every 12,000 miles. In tandem with variable four-wheel-drive, trick terrain modes, high and low-range gearing, a locking central differential and hill descent control, the oil burner makes light work of towing a three-axle (3,500kg) trailer or a twin-axle (3,100kg) trailer over hard, soft or uneven ground on standard road tyres. As for pulling heavy loads this is said to be safer (Trailer Stability Assist) and easier (Hill Start Assist) than ever as a host of smart technologies make their debut here.

Other new safety devices include Blind Spot Warning with Lane Change Assist, Lane Departure Warning and Rear Cross Traffic Alert, and Forward Collision Warning with automatic braking.

The aim of these driver aids is to make the L200 as easy and as car-like as possible to drive on a day-to-day basis, especially more expensive versions. Many buyers tend to use their pick-up as a work tool Monday to Friday and as a vehicle to transport the family during weekends.

Rudimentary versions such as the introductory



**INTERIOR:** Mitsubishi wanted to make the Series 6's cabin less commercial in look and feel so it gets higher-grade plastics and some tactile materials. Quilt-type seats in the Barbarian X are heated and have special embroidery. Centre touchscreen is small and does without sat-nav but is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto and is simple to pair together. A chunky rotary dial selects 2WD/4WD and buttons the off-road modes and hill descent (inset).

- + Rugged, no nonsense look
- + Impresses on- and off-road
- + All-round quality has risen

- Sat-nav still isn't an option
- Diesel engine is coarse
- Pay load trails some rivals

RATING  
 4.5

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- 2017 SEAT ALHAMBRA 2.0 TDI CR SE 21,141MILES ..... £17,995
- 2017 PEUGEOT 5008 2.0 BLUEHDI GT LINE 11,007MILES ..... £23,085
- 2018 VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN 2.0 TDI 4MOTION 9 436 MILES ..... £28,990

## PRESTIGE



- 2016 AUDI A1 1.6 TDI SPORT 47,473 MILES ..... £9,845
- 2014 BMW X1 XDRIVE 18D M SPORT 66,656 MILES ..... £9,995
- 2014 MERCEDES-BENZ A180 CDI AMG 54,668 MILES ..... £12,495
- 2013 AUDI Q3 2.0 TDI QUATTRO SE S TRONIC 48,524 MILES ..... £13,595
- 2014 VOLVO XC60 D4 181 R DESIGN 68,616 MILES ..... £14,895
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- 2015 MITSUBISHI L200 CHALLENGER 59,734 MILES ..... £10,995+VAT
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## SUVS



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- 2013 VAUXHALL ANTARA 2.2 CDTI 27,588 MILES ..... £6,995
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- 2015 PEUGEOT PARTNER 1.6 HDI 44,260 MILES ..... £5,995+VAT
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## FIRST DRIVE: Jaguar XE SV Project 8 Touring

## We drive world's fastest, most exclusive saloon

## In Gear SPEC SHEET

<b>Jaguar XE SV Project 8 Touring</b>	
Price:	£149,995 (as tested)
Engine:	5-litre, supercharged V8 petrol
Power/torque:	592bhp/516lb ft
Transmission:	8-speed automatic, four-wheel-drive
0-60mph:	3.3seconds
Top speed:	186mph
Economy:	25.7mpg
CO2:	254g/Km



**STYLING:** All Touring specification Project 8 cars wear the same wide and low-slung bodywork constructed from either naked or painted carbon fibre. Lightweight forged 20-inch alloys hide carbon-ceramic discs mated to yellow brake calipers. Curved boot spoiler maintains aerodynamic balance. The Touring is sold in four unique paint finishes – Valencia Orange, Velocity Blue, Corrie Grey Satin and British Racing Green – while Project 8 decals are optional.



## By Jason Craig

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**IN** the last issue of In Gear we were given a taster of what Jaguar's Special Vehicle Operations arm is capable of with the F-Pace SVR: a 5.0-litre, 542bhp, 176mph Sport Utility Vehicle that made a lasting impression and left us wanting more of the 'ultimate performance' experience.

As with that car there is an equally interesting story behind the latest creation to emerge from the shadows of SVO's Technical Centre near JLR's Coventry base. This Touring version of the XE SV Project 8 was never originally on the agenda; the plan had always been to build the most extreme V8-powered four-door saloon with either two seats and a roll cage or four and call it a day after all 300 examples had been sold. Or that was the case before customers spoke up.

Some of those drawn to the Jaguar XE SV Project 8 idea said they were quite willing to sacrifice speed and track-developed aerodynamic wings and spoilers for something less in-your-face.

Based on the regular record-breaking Project 8 that lapped the Nurburgring in seven minutes 18.361 seconds, the Touring is marketed as a "more restrained, road-orientated" alternative.

It packs the same 592bhp and zero to 60 time of 3.3 seconds but the top speed of the Tourer

has been lowered to 186mph compared to the original's, which is a supercar-rivalling 200mph. The only other discernible difference is the boot lid's lip spoiler. This replaces the Project 8's adjustable carbon fibre wing that generates a colossal 122Kg of downforce. To put that into context, the boot had to be strengthened in order to stop it from buckling under the forces.

Carbon fibre is a running theme here and has been used to construct the ground hugging front splitter that, unlike on the Project 8 model, is mounted in position and cannot be extended to suck the nose closer to the road at higher speeds. Common to both is the bonnet, bumpers, front fenders, mirror covers, and blade-like side skirts emblazoned with the words, "No Step".

Lurking behind the lighter – and stronger – forged alloy wheels are carbon-ceramic disc brakes measuring 400mm at the front and 396mm at the back. If sensors deem these to be cold on start-up the pads will grab them repeatedly to build up heat for instant stopping power. Wrapped in super sticky Michelin Sport Cup 2 rubber, engineers had to reposition the XE's headlamps by an inch to fit these. A titanium exhaust completes the SVO transformation.

Wrapped up in that butch bodywork are various components that serve as the car's lifeblood. Air meeting the centre grille passes through the main cooling pack before exiting the boomerang-shaped louvre in the centre of bonnet – a process that cuts down drag and raises downforce.

Behind the drilled air intakes at the bottom of

the bumper are two radiator packs: one keeps the oil cooler running at its optimum temperature while the other modulates the car's air con. There are even holes on the face of the rear bumper's undertray so that the hot air created by the clever electronic differential can escape as it shuffles torque between the back tyres.

## REALITY

Remarkably, eight months is all that was needed to make the Touring idea a reality and those who worked on the project insist that the temptation to cut corners never entered their mind.

Having experienced the Touring we found the car to be docile – normal, even – when you are happy to follow the road as it unfolds rather than aim the nose for the apex of a corner, or map out the shortest line along a country lane that weaves left and then right. Stretching the front and rear tracks, and pushing the wheels right to the corners, creates a solid foundation.

One downside of Project 8 cars is that they are all left-hand-drive only due to the cost associated with having to move components such as the power steering pump to the other side of the cabin. As if that was not hard enough to get your brain around in such an explosive piece of craftsmanship, the car's extra girth commands your complete attention when meeting HGVs.

Electronically variable dampers developed and supplied by Bilstein have a big part to play in this department. Other than 'Track' – the most extreme setting you can select from the four on offer (Eco, Comfort and Dynamic being the others) – the Touring is not the spine-breaking experience associated with track-inspired cars. Wander into a nasty pothole and your back will survive intact every single time. How? As the shock on either front wheel extends this is picked up by one of the car's eight ECUs and 'preloads' the two rear dampers to counteract the jolt. Similar technology also exists in the mainstream, the Ford Focus hatch being a prime example.

Special software has been installed for the steering rack which is weighted just-so and sends a constant stream of information to your fingertips. The Touring is a car that is happy for you to take the lead, to show it the way without developing white knuckle syndrome. It doesn't fidget under hard acceleration or squirm under quick and repeated directional changes. Think of it as an onion: peeling away each layer with care means you won't be left with teary eyes.

That idiom is as old as the hills and although the V8 powering the Project 8 is rapidly chalking up years of service, constant tweaks to the internals see it continue to avoid the chop in the face of anti-gas guzzling legislation. This is a motor full of character and perfectly suited to a car like this.

**DRIVING:** Acceleration is relentless in the Project 8 Touring thanks to a motorsport-tuned V8 and a rapid shifting 8-speed automatic. Lateral grip is on a different plane to anything we have experienced before, even in 'Dynamic' and 'Track' modes which channel more of the engine's 592bhp to the rear. The steering loads up nicely at speed and despite the suspension's stiffness the ride never gets crashy.

A head of steam is built up in no time at all and the longer you keep the noisy pedal planted the greater the whine from the supercharger. You never tire of hearing it, nor do you fail to smile each time the quad pipe exhausts contribute via their eclectic mix of tunes. There is everything from an angry, deep-chested growl, to a rasping chorus of metallic gunfire.

Keep the revs up and the music that fills the cabin is a delight. Pop the transmission into 'S' and you chose when to pull the expensive looking metallic paddle shifters behind the steering wheel. The 8-speed ZF box responds with slick precision and if left to its own devices is just as good. Apart from the noise, and the sight of pedestrians pointing and staring – mouths open – you do tend to forget that this is not any ordinary XE on the other side of the driver's door.

The Touring's cabin is 90% similar to a range-topping XE (pre-facelift). A missed opportunity? SVO bosses don't think so, saying instead this approach is intentional and not accidental. By way of fairy dust these saloons have a full colour driver's display with unique SV logos, a pistol grip gear shifter first seen in the F-Type roadster, high-backed leather/Alcantara seats with Project 8 stitching, and Project 8 scuff plates. The steering wheel is trimmed in suede and a half moon of carbon fibre extends from the driver's door card and follows the contour of the dash before ending its journey on the passenger's side. There is also a small plaque that tells you what number of the 300 cars built it is. Unfortunately, there is no escaping the fact that the interior struggles to align itself with a car costing the guts of £150,000.

- + Works as a daily driver
- + Beautifully balanced chassis
- + Intoxicating soundtrack

- Only 15 are being built
- No right-hand-drive versions
- Car based on pre-facelift XE

RATING

4.5



**CABIN:** In comparison to the Touring's exterior styling, the interior is more measured. Sports seats and sill plates are Project 8 branded while carbon fibre is present around the pistol-grip shifter and door cards. Digital driver display is configurable and gets SVO graphics, while 10-inch infotainment system is shared with other Jaguar cars. Touring is a strict four-seater.



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