Escape offers car-like driving dynamics

From pg. 1

2.5-litre naturally-aspirated four cylinder (168 hp, 170 lb/ft), moving up to the 1.6-litre turbocharged "Ecoboost" four (178 hp, 184 lb/ft), and lastly the 2.0 litre Ecoboost that delivers 240 hp and 270 lb/ft of torque.

Escape is based on the global C platform, shared with the Focus, and with its steeply-raked windshield, rear-sloping roofline and tapered greenhouse, looks a lot like Ford's popular compact hatch – albeit taller and larger.

Despite these efforts to make the Escape less trucky, engineers managed to carve out even more cargo space: 971 litres behind the 60/40 second row seats, and a generous 1,920 litres with them dropped.

That's a little less than competitors like Toyota RAV4 and Honda CR-V, but still plenty for a weekend of camping, as I had mentioned in an earlier review.

Fast-forward to 2016, and the big change is Ford's new SYNC 3 infotainment system. This may not seem a big deal, unless you've tried its finicky MyFord Touch predecessor.

Menus for audio, climate, phone, navigation, apps and vehicle settings are nicely organized under six large buttons on the eight-inch touchscreen. It's easy to see and operate, which is great for those who've graduated to reading glasses or are doing this from a

Abundant soft-touch materials in the doors and dash, metallic accents and "ice blue" accent lighting all contribute to a premium look and feel inside the 2016 Ford Escape.

moving vehicle.

Pinch and swipe functions, which work like your smart phone or tablet, also help make the job easier – especially when zooming in and out of the navigation map.

Climate can be controlled by touchscreen, or more quickly with the nearby knobs and buttons. Sometimes the older ways are still better.

All this electronic wizardry is nice, but what resonates even more with families who buy these vehicles is the Escape's comfortable and spacious interior.

Indeed, the passenger cabin is a nice place to be with its premium materials and abundant soft touch throughout the doors and dash, not to mention attractive upholstery – at least in my 4WD SE tester with its optional leather/fabric seating, with 10-way power adjust and heating up front.

Unlike some compact SUVs, there's abundant legroom in the second row, and the rear seats recline. A pull of the same lever also makes them drop for a flat cargo floor.

Standard equipment on my SE model includes manual air conditioning, tilt/telescopic steering with cruise and audio controls, 12-volt and 110-volt power outlets, automatic halogen headlamps, six-speaker audio, rear spoiler, 17-inch alloys, chrome dual exhausts, and heated side mirrors with integrated turn signals and puddle lamps.

Pricing is a bit complicated, as

the mid-trim Escape ranges from $25,999 for the 2.5-litre FWD SE to $29,699 for the 2.0-litre Ecoboost 4WD SE. Best to check the website for current deals.

Mine also included a $1,750 panoramic sunroof and $1,350 chrome package, the latter really adding panache with brightwork in the door handles, side mirrors, roof rails and grille – not to mention big 19-inch chrome alloys.

I also had a power liftgate ($500), which is standard in Titanium trim where it confers the added benefit of being activated by a wave of the foot. Every Escape gets Ford's proprietary MyKey system, which allows parents to set limits and reminders for their young drivers. You can mute the audio system, limit the top speed and have the warning chime drive them bonkers until all seatbelts are buckled.

Also standard is the 1.6-litre Ecoboost with six-speed automatic transmission. My SE, however, came with the more potent 2.0 litre engine ($1,000), delivering plenty of punch off the line – particularly in Sport mode with its sharper throttle response and later shifts.

And with its precise steering, quick reflexes and firmer suspension than is typical in this segment, this vehicle drives more like a hatchback than a small truck.

Which is great for those who still enjoy driving, but need a family hauler.