

Little Fiesta is acting big

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seats, premium sound and fancy 16-inch wheels, it also includes Ford's SYNC, that integrates mobile phones with Microsoft developed onboard voice-activation and entertainment system.

It does more than listen to commands; it acts on them. For instance, if you receive a text message, you can ask SYNC to read it to you. You can tell it to call someone on the phone or you can ask the system to play a certain song(s) or 'shuffle on' which mixes music in certain genres or al fresco.

In addition, information is always displayed on the four-inch LCD monitor in the upper centre of the dash.

On top of that, the system will make an emergency 911 call through a cellphone if an airbag(s) goes off. Oh, and the sound quality of the six-speaker premium audio system probably sets the bar for a car priced under twenty grand.

I thought SYNC would have been reserved for Lincolns and other high-end Fords; but it makes sense to work it into the Fiesta lineup as mostly younger buyers will already be adept at using new age media.

A nifty thing is interior lighting in the front and rear footwells and cupholders that comes in the driver's choice of

seven different colours.

But the SES also comes with the optional 'Intelligent Access' a push-button start with remote fob. I was hoping this was going to be fad like chrome gills on the front fenders, but push buttons show no sign of fading away.

My advice, never let the remote out of your grasp or you'll never start the car.

The engine of the Fiesta is willing and revs freely while benefitting from the latest technology like variable valve timing that not only provides good fuel economy but makes cold weather starting a whole lot easier.

I put many miles on the SES wrangling other cars and meeting incoming journalists at the airport during a 12-vehicle comparison for the Canadian Automotive Jury Best of the Best awards, one of the finalists of which was the Ford Fiesta. For more information on these awards see www.thecanadianautomotivejury.ca.

I had the five-speed manual with a positive, spring-loaded shifter that found the right slot every time. When you have hoards of massive transport trucks all around you, being able to concentrate on where you're going instead of getting hung up on a gear change is a very big thing indeed.

Speaking of highway travel, both outside mirrors have a second small



Power for the Fiesta is a 1.6-litre, inline four-cylinder engine producing 120 hp and 112 lb/ft of torque driving the front wheels through a five-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission.

wide-angle mirror built in that does wonders for letting the driver see into the blind spot.

Steering is quick and precise thanks to the electric power steering on the Fiesta. It comes with 'active nibble' control software which helps smooth out wheel vibration especially at higher speeds.

The front seats are big and comfy but I would have liked the steering wheel to be a tad further away. The back seat, however, requires those in the front to

be careful how far back they slide the seat.

For a small car, cargo volume is pretty good with 435 litres (15.5 cu ft) behind the second seat in the hatchback and 363 litres (12.8 cu ft) for luggage in the sedan. If you look under the cargo floor cover of the hatchbacks there is a hidden storage cubbie for hiding valuable items.

Base price for the Fiesta SES as tested was \$18,999, and as tested, \$20,879 including a \$1,350 shipping fee.

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