

Road Test Ford Fiesta 2011: Low in price but high on content

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It's not often you'd think of the smallest and least expensive car in the fleet as a firm's most important, but that may be the case with Ford's 2011 Fiesta subcompact.

While the F-150 pickup truck has been the bread and butter vehicle for Ford, topping the sales charts year after year, the Fiesta brings a whole new audience to the Ford brand.

The Fiesta was launched here last year after tremendous success in Europe and Asia. It has won numerous awards around the world, including the Best New Small Car under \$21,000 by the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC).

Based on a platform originally designed by Mazda (when the two companies were financially intertwined) and used on the Mazda2 now on sale here as well, the Fiesta comes in both four-door sedan and five-door hatchback styles.

My tester was five-door SE model, starting at \$16,799.

Now, with gas prices currently in the \$1.30/litre range in Southern Ontario, consumers are once again taking notice of small, fuel-efficient vehicles in even greater

numbers.

Unlike most cars in the subcompact class, the Fiesta is much more than just a bare-bones vehicle. It offers 15 class-exclusive technologies and delivers 4.9L/100 km highway fuel economy—the best in class according to Ford.

The Fiesta starts at just \$12,999 for the S Sedan that has features like anti-lock brakes (ABS), power side mirrors, electronic power-assisted steering, electronic stability control, seven standard air bags and tilt/telescoping steering wheel.

Many of these would have been unheard of on base models of subcompacts in the past, but times have changed and technological advances have made many of these features financially feasible.

Powered by a Duratec 1.6-litre DOHC inline four-cylinder engine, making 120 hp and 112 lb/ft of torque, the Fiesta comes with a standard five-speed manual transmission or an optional six-speed automatic.

The automatic has a fuel rating of 6.9/5.1L/100 km city/highway, while the manual comes in at 7.1/5.3L/100 km. However, the best fuel economy is achieved with

the automatic and the SFE (Super Fuel Economy) package that includes side-tire deflectors, underbody shields, lower grille blocker, cruise control, spare wheel with wheel cap and rear spoiler (on the sedan).

This is a \$500 option and re-

dry clutch package.

The "dry" transmission operates with sealed internal lubrication, reducing internal friction and adding to the fuel economy. With no pumps and hoses, Ford says this transmission improves fuel economy by nine per cent.



One of Ford's top-selling models around the world, the Fiesta subcompact returns to North America for the 2011 model year. With 15 class-exclusive technologies, the Fiesta also has a best-in-class fuel economy rating of 4.9L/100 km on the highway.

sults in fuel economy numbers of 6.8/4.9L/100 km city/highway.

Helping Ford reach these fuel economy numbers is the new Powershift transmission, a dual clutch gearbox that combines the responsive performance and fuel economy of a manual transmission with the convenience of a traditional automatic in an advanced

dry clutch package. The interior has the look of a much more expensive vehicle, with greater use of soft-touch materials and contrasting colours than you normally see in this segment. Different seat fabric options are available, including leather.

One feature that stands out is the centre stack, designed to look and work like a cell-phone keypad. Ford says this is an important element in helping market the car to

a key demographic group—the 16- to 30-year-olds.

These are people who are always connected through their cell phones, computers and other mobile devices. Ford's available SYNC system (a \$650 option on the SE) integrates a mobile device with Fiesta's onboard voice-activated communications and entertainment system. For example, if you get a text message, you can tell SYNC to read it to you or you can ask SYNC to play a certain musical selection or place a phone call for you.

Steering is light, yet responsive and the ride and handling is excellent for a car in this segment, certainly on par with many more expensive ones I've driven in the past year.

During AJAC testing for Car of the Year last fall, the Fiesta posted a 0-100 km/h time of 10.7 seconds, yet it feels quicker on the road. It is a light car at 1,179 kg (2,593 lb) and that helps in the handling.

The Powershift transmission shifts smoothly and the engine is fairly quiet at speed, although a bit noisy if you push it on takeoff.

All in all, it's no wonder Ford has such big hopes for its smallest car. The Fiesta has a lot going for it and is sure to bring more customers into the Ford fold.

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