

Ford Fiesta ST-3 review

Motoring correspondent Mark Gallivan looks at the latest hot hatch from [Ford](#), the Fiesta ST-3, and puts it through its paces.

Of all the obstacles facing the buyer of the best hot hatch, the hefty entry price looms largest. To experience the fun and practicality of the hairiest hatch like the rip-roaring Honda Civic Type R you'll need to stump up around €56,300.

That's a considerable investment when a pre-owned Porsche 981 Boxster (2012 – 2016) with a screaming flat-six engine will fill that price perfectly.

Putting five-seater practicality aside, the possibility of owning the last of the six-cylinder Porsche Boxster generation leaves you grappling if you really need those same five seats in something like the Volkswagen Golf R.

There is a smarter, far less costly way to coral all the thrills of the hottest hatch by going down a segment into supermini-land. There's one supermini, now with just three cylinders that's equally action-packed as the big hatches: step forward the blockbusting 2021 Ford Fiesta ST. The model we tested was the ST-3 (2020 spec) 1.5 litre EcoBoost with 200 PS (197bhp)/ 290 Nm torque and 0-100 km/h (0-62 mph) in 6.5 seconds with 232 km/h for €29,899 (based on 3-door 2020 prices).

Hot to trot

Our five-door car ST-3 was optioned up to €32,449 and came with standard 18" alloy wheels, Ford SYNC 3 Navigation, Recaro front seats, Traffic Sign Recognition, Driver Alert, Electronic Temp Control, KeyFree entry and start, red brake calipers and optioned on this car, the Performance Pack with limited slip differential, launch control and LED headlights.

Externally it's relatively easy to spot the Fiesta ST over the standard car.

Standard equipment includes ST alloy wheels, different front grille, front bumper, side body moldings, rear diffuser, large roof spoiler and ST badges. Yet the ST's exterior design is demure and bar the larger wheels it could easily pass for a less expensive Fiesta with ST-line trim.

A performance car

Now it's true: you can have similar fun in a thrilling performance hatch in a car that costs half the price of the hottest hatch. As ever the sublime recipe is in the Fiesta ST's details. The steering feels weighty, even in corners you will need to work the steering rack far harder than an average supermini. Every nuance, change of road camber, undulation or bump is transmitted directly into the driver's hands. Even up to the point of maximum lock – two turns lock to lock - the counterbalance weighting never lets up.

It's the talent of the standard Ford Fiesta's steering given an additional steroidal pump that results in this car having hardly any steering slack. In the ST all steering adjustments instantly cantilevers the entire car in a rotation like it is suspended on a set square compass from your school days. This level of ability is usually found only in the best sports cars. No Fiesta ST will ever match a Lotus or Caterham – how could it? But the effect is mightily close.

The gearchanges from the six-speed gearbox has a slightly mechanical action, like a Mazda MX-5, and though it's not the smoothest gait it begs to be used hard and often transmitting not a hint of vagueness or sloppy action.

The last piece is the jigsaw is the engine – lusty and happy to rev hard past 6,000 rpm it can be wrung out to the maximum of the car's available 200 PS power and yet, somehow, manage 40 mpg easily.

Buried in the spec sheet for this car is the Performance Pack with a Quaife limited slip-diff and launch control that includes a Track setting added to Normal and Sport that mutes the traction control for the full hooligan experience. With the right amount of enthusiasm on the track it's possible to attack bends on just three wheels with one dangling aimlessly in the air. Hard accelerations are hampered by torque steer from the front wheel drive system.

This is the experience you'll find in most highly powered front-wheel drive cars where the steering is overburdened by the power from the drivetrain and forces you left or right making hard steering inputs necessary to keep the car in the direction you are travelling.

The best news for Fiesta ST buyers is the interior spruce-up over the last Fiesta ST. Even the adoption of three instead of four cylinders has not lost the sparkle that the last ST provided in spades. If this review has focused solely on the Fiesta ST's handling and composure there is a good reason: it's the best performance supermini of them all. To take on the bigger hot hatch establishment and compete well at this price says everything you need to know. The 2021 Fiesta ST is a dynamic titan and a five star recommended buy.

You'll like: Crackerjack supermini handling, three or five-door option, sublime steering and beefy gearbox, thrilling beyond the price tag. Good mpg.

You'll grumble: Restricted space

Fleet rating: Five stars