

## Ford B-Max

By Jim Mc Cauley

Ford has enlarged its Fiesta range with the addition of the B-Max which shares the basic underpinnings of their top selling hatchback model. But it opens up a whole new approach to the model range, quite literally, with the larger bodysell featuring wide side access thanks to the removal of the traditional 'B' post. Maintaining the standard front hinged doors, the rear doors slide back giving 1.5 metres clear access to the

roomy cabin. Although the 'B' post appears to no longer exist, it is cleverly integrated into the leading edge of the rear doors and continues to contribute to the vehicle's strength, confirmed by its 5-star EuroNCAP award.

The thinking behind the B-Max was to provide a family friendly vehicle with easy access, yet one which offers supporting driving dynamics. Maintaining a strong Ford family resemblance, the high bodied, easy access Fiesta derivative carries intricate side panelling sculpture which gives the

car a youthful and adventurous appearance. Inside, the instrument panel has a luxurious soft-touch finish while optional upgrades extend to quality leather upholstery.

Like any Ford range, a wide choice of engines is available including the company's astonishing 1.0 litre turbocharged petrol unit. Test choice, however, was the high mileage option – the 1.6 litre TDCI diesel engine. This 95PS unit delivers power to the front wheels via a 5-speed manual gearbox and compared to the petrol versions sits more solidly on the road.

Cabin is familiar Ford with the test car finished in the highest Titanium specification of the 3-trim range.

A push-button starter fires up the car with little intrusion from the diesel power unit. Despite its higher bodywork, the B-Max maintains the composure of a lower slung hatchback and the expected cornering roll is well restrained to allow the driver to press on. Cabin refinement



is also noteworthy with engine, road and wind noise all well muted even at motorway speeds.

Accommodation-wise, the B-Max is a comfortable 5-seater with the wide side access giving excellent clearance for dealing with cargo when the rear seats are folded. The



front passenger seat also folds forward to give a loading length of up to 2.3 metres.

Ford see the model as wooing new customers to the brand with a prediction of 60% conquest sales, taking a mix of those trading up as well as downsizing.

While the range starts at a whisker under £13,000, the 1.6 litre diesel model tested in top Titanium trim is listed at £18,895 but there were suggestions that dealers are always willing to negotiate a little on pricing.

At this specification, equipment levels tick all the boxes with larger 16-inch wheels, front fog lights, Sony sound system and automatic air conditioning all part of the package. The Titanium model also features cruise control, automatic headlights and wipers, Electronic Stability Program with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution and Emergency Brake Assist, 'Quickclear' windscreen and automatic dimming interior mirror.

Overall, the B-Max is a well engineered expansion of the Fiesta range in a vehicle that is more practical and extends the range appeal. The sliding doors will be appreciated by those using child seats as well as those with mild disabilities who will find rear access so much easier.

But the vehicle also scores well on its economy with a an official combined fuel consumption of 70.6 mpg, and while its 0-62 mph time may be a little tardy at 13.9 seconds, it is its mid-range punch and in-gear flexibility that make this power unit so attractive. With a CO2 emissions of 104 gms/km, the vehicle is in Band B for zero first year car tax and £20 per year thereafter. Like all Ford vehicles, the B-Max is covered by a 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty with 12-year anti-perforation cover.

Aside from the vehicle, Ford is also using its launch to introduce the availability of 'MyKey'. The Ford-exclusive MyKey enables owners to programme a key – usually for younger drivers – that restricts the top speed of the car, reduces the maximum volume of the audio system, and even disables the audio system altogether if driver and passengers are not using safety belts. It can also prevent the driver from deactivating safety technologies such as Electronic Stability Control and Active City Stop, which can help mitigate or prevent low-speed collisions.

MyKey works by recognising different keys for the same car and then adjusting the vehicle settings according to the owner's requirements. It also enables owners to

programme chimes to sound at set points between 40-80mph, prevents seatbelt reminders from being disabled and delivers an earlier low-fuel warning.