

Packing a Bundle

Into a Small Package

By Roger Witherspoon

For \$20,000, one doesn't expect to get a lot out of car except for basic transportation and a relatively comfortable ride. Amenities, in this range, are usually few, and since these are compact cars, they tend to be designed for average sized adults in the front, and kids in the back – tall folks need not apply.

So there were no particular expectations when the 2008 Ford Focus rolled up, except that it would be sturdy little car with a modest amount of amenities. But the guys with the crayons at Ford had other ideas, and their new Focus is more than a modest jump ahead of the compact pack.

From the outside, the Focus has lost its nondescript look and adopted a character of its own. The slashing chrome grill resembles the sardonic grin of a teenager mocking the adult world – it's aggressive without being threatening like a Dodge Magnum. The shape of its jagged-edged, chrome lined Halogen headlights is repeated in a chrome side vent and again in the slashing tail lights. The effect is the Focus looks like a little car that can get up and go – it has flair you rarely see in this class.

And if you want, the Focus can really go. Under the hood, the Focus has just a 140-horsepower, four-cylinder engine, which is typical in compacts. But on a small, lightweight car like this one, that is more than enough power to keep the Focus ahead of normal traffic, or push into triple digits and attract the Highway Patrol if you are racing across the high plains on highways in the nation's Southwestern states. And if one does choose to exceed the speed limits, it helps that the Focus comes with traction control.

But the major design surprises are not cosmetic. The Focus packs a lot in a small package. A skeptical neighbor who stands six-foot, five inches tall – not counting his cap – eyed the styling of the Focus approvingly, but had no interest in sitting down in the rear. He was pleased to note that the rear door opens nearly a full 90 degrees, making it easier for him to slide inside.

Then there was another surprise: neither his knees nor his head were touching anything. That is because the designers wanted a car that might attract tall folks, and the back of the front seat was concave – to add another two inches of knee room – and the rear seat was indented as well. Looking up, he noted that the ceiling broke over the back seat, and arched upwards about three inches. On the side, he noted that the arm rests were leather covered and padded, and set about three inches inside the door, thus giving added elbow room. The effect of this utilization of space is to give the impression that the passenger cabin is larger than it really is, and the Focus could easily pass as a mid sized car rather than a compact. The powered sunroof adds to the feeling of spaciousness in the cabin.

Ford's designers used the same tactic in the trunk, dropping the floor down and moving the gas tank out of the way so the trunk is surprisingly deep. It can easily hold two full golf bags or about a week's worth of luggage.

There are other touches one does not usually find in a compact. The seats were leather instead of the usual cloth, and the front seats could be heated. The steering wheel

is also leather-wrapped, and has fingertip controls for the cruise command, telephone, and entertainment system. And it is in the electronics where the Focus is really surprising.

Ford has included its Microsoft SYNC voice activated system which allows you to verbally control the entertainment center – which is extensive. There is AM, FM and Sirius satellite radio, an six-disc, in-dash CD player, and a hard drive with outlets for an iPod or MP3 player and a USB port for a flash cube with 1,000 or so of your personally selected tunes. In addition, the Focus has a Bluetooth communications system which detects your cell phone as soon as you enter the car.

In developing the 2008 Focus, Ford took an afterthought of a vehicle which merely provided efficient transportation and turned it into a car many will want to be seen and cruise around in.

2008 Ford Focus

MSRP:		\$20,205
EPA Mileage:	24 MPG City	33 MPG Highway

Performance/ Safety:

2.0-Liter I-4 DOHC aluminum engine producing 140 horsepower and 136 pound-feet of torque; front wheel drive; 5-speed automatic transmission; independent front & rear suspension; anti-lock brakes; traction control; 16-inch, aluminum alloy wheels; fog lamps; driver & passenger front air bags; side and curtain air bags.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; Microsoft SYNC voice control system; 6-disc CD changer; iPod connection & USB port; Bluetooth phone connection; tilt telescope with fingertip audio, phone and cruise controls; leather bucket seats; heated front seats; power sunroof; 60/40 fold down rear seats.