

Shifting Gears

[Party Time, Fiesta Style](#)

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By Roger Witherspoon

If nothing else, the commercials for the 2011 Ford Fiesta will grab your attention.

When the compact sedan starts, bells ring, whistles blow, carnival performers materialize as if by magic and the Fiesta is the center of an impromptu celebration. That's a lot of fanfare for a little car. So what is this Fiesta and what, exactly, is the fuss about?

Nominally, the Fiesta represents an ambitious effort by Detroit's most profitable car company to engineer a real competitor into the small sedan segment dominated by the Honda Fit, Nissan Versa, and Toyota's sub compact Yaris and the larger, Corolla. That is a tough, established crowd for an American upstart to try and muscle into. But the Fiesta does come into the home market with a bit of road experience. Ford has already sold a half million Fiesta's worldwide and, at this juncture, feels it is ready to roll on the main stage.



The Fiesta is the automotive equivalent of a sweet onion: as you peel back the layers, the more goodies you find. On the surface, it is a compact sedan with about the size you'd expect for set of wheels selling for under \$20,000. But Ford took some time in the design of its little car, avoiding the appearance of a cheap little box. The Fiesta has more of a stretched egg shape, beginning with a small, black, smiling grill and gently, smoothly curving up and around a surprisingly big passenger compartment and ending in flat-back half hidden under a small spoiler. And while the four-cylinder engine will never be mistaken for a racing motor, the spoiler seems appropriate rather than an out of place conceit.

The car's aluminum power plant produces only 120 horsepower and 112 pound/feet of torque, but that's more than enough give the lightweight, manually operated Fiesta a sporty feel. You may have to downshift the five-speed manual transmission to produce enough torque to avoid slowing down on steep hills, but once you've done that, the Fiesta will accelerate nicely. In fact, the Fiesta's top speed is 120, and when you are cruising in the triple digits, its responsiveness on curves, instantaneous handling and maneuvering, and effortless gear shifts bring the driving experience far closer to the feel of an Audi A-4 than that of the other compact vehicles nominally in its class.

Inside, Ford has borrowed a lot of technology from the company's larger, more established small sedan, the Focus. But its design is completely new. The windshield, for example, looks extra large – a design cue borrowed from the long lasting VW Beetle. But there is *so much* glass all around the Fiesta that the interior seems to incorporate the great outdoors. As a result, there is a feeling of spaciousness not usually found in a compact. The interior roof line arches up sharply to make sure that those on the north side of six feet tall are comfortable in the front and back seats. And while the seats are manually operated and cloth covered, they are, surprisingly, heated.



Generally, cars in this price range have a fairly plain dash and the interior feel is one of economy instead of style. Not so with this party car. The center of the dash, with the gadget console, arrogantly curves inward so it is easy to reach for the driver or a front passenger. And items – such as CD, RADIO, and PHONE – are clearly written out in block letters so one does not have to fumble for the right controls for the climate control or entertainment functions. And the items are back lit for easy location in the dark.

There are also soft lights under the dash, in the doors and cup holders to make it easy to find items when driving at night. And the color can be changed or the night lights turned completely off at the touch of a button.

The Fiesta lacks a navigation system, but it does have the Ford SYNC system, which uses voice or manual controls to activate the broadcast or satellite radio, phone, single disc CD player, or the auxiliary systems containing docks for iPods, MP3 players or USB drives. These systems may also be activated using fingertip controls on the leather-wrapped steering wheel.

The cargo area, by itself, is small. But the rear seats fold flat and, in that mode, the hatchback has an ample amount of storage space.

It is unlikely one will hear brass bands playing, see people dancing, or be regaled by singing skydivers when you get behind the wheel of a 2011 Fiesta. But it may well draw a satisfied, long lasting smile.



2011 Ford Fiesta

5-Door Hatchback

MSRP: **\$18,590**

EPA Mileage: **28 MPG City** **37 MPG Highway**

Top Speed: **120 MPH**

Performance / Safety:

1.6-Liter DOHC, aluminum 4-cylinder engine producing 120 horsepower and 112 pound/feet of torque; front wheel drive; 5-speed manual transmission; independent MacPherson strut front suspension; twist beam rear suspension; power assisted front disk and rear drum brakes; 4-wheel, anti-lock braking system; electronic stability control; 16-inch aluminum alloy wheels; heated mirrors; driver knee airbag; side and curtain airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/ FM/ Sirius Satellite radio; six speakers; single disc CD player; MP3, iPod and USB connections; Bluetooth cell phone connection; SYNC voice activated command system; leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip cruise, phone, and entertainment controls; heated cloth seats; adjustable ambient night lights.