

Safety, technology upgraded in 2016 Ford Focus hatchback

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This photo provided by Ford shows the 2016 Ford Focus Titanium hatchback. Ford's jack-of-all-trades Focus hatchback adds a racy RS model for 2016, offers more safety features than ever and now has an easier, more responsive voice-recognition system for making phone calls and sending texts. (Courtesy of Ford via AP)

Ford's jack-of-all-trades Focus hatchback has been upgraded for 2016 with a racy RS model, new safety features and a more responsive voice-recognition system for making phone calls and sending texts.

The 2016 Focus RS is the top model now and has all-wheel drive and a turbocharged, 350-horsepower, EcoBoost, four-cylinder engine churning out a whopping 227 more horsepower than the base hatchback model. That power on such a lightweight compact five-door Focus is attracting widespread attention from driving enthusiasts and weekend racers who are undeterred by the starting price tag, including destination charge, of \$36,775.

That's nearly \$17,000 more than the price for a base Focus SE hatchback, which is \$19,890 starting manufacturer's suggested [retail price](#), including destination charge.

All Focus hatchback models have an updated list of optional safety equipment this year, such as blind spot monitoring and lane-keeping assist—both often found on luxury cars and meant to help drivers steer clear of collisions. But they're an affordable option, coming in a technology package that adds \$795 on a Focus Titanium hatchback (starting retail price: \$24,600), which already comes standard with a six-speed automatic transmission.

Every 2016 Focus hatchback also can have the new Sync 3 interface that's more user-friendly, faster and more responsive than the previous MyFord Touch interface. The new system is programmed to recognize many normal conversation phrases so drivers don't have to learn exact commands and don't have to fuss as much with the touchscreen display. Plus, Sync 3 works well with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay.

But Consumer Reports continues to rate Focus reliability much worse than average, while the federal government said the five-door Focus earned five out of five stars in frontal and side crash protection.

Standard equipment on all Focus hatchbacks includes a rearview camera, electronic stability control and seven air bags, including a driver knee air

bag to help keep the driver properly positioned behind the steering wheel during a crash.

The Focus is second most-popular Ford car among U.S. consumers, after the mid-size Fusion sedan.

The comfortable, 14.3-foot length of the Focus hatchback and flexible seating makes it a useful vehicle for carrying people and cargo. The back seats fold down to expand cargo space from a commendable 23.3 cubic feet to an SUV-like 43.9 cubic feet.

In the test-driven Focus hatchback—a Titanium trim level—the cargo floor material was a step up from the cheap, thin covering expected in a low-priced hatchback, and items stowed inside easily and without having to lift them high up. The test car also had a quieter-than-expected interior and luxury car appointments that included heated, leather-trimmed front seats and a Sony 10-speaker sound system. Even the rear windows had one-touch control.

The 160-horsepower, 2-liter, dual-overhead cam, four-cylinder engine in the test vehicle is the middle level in the Focus lineup. It was not turbocharged, but its gasoline direct-injection design helped provide good pep to handle passing maneuvers on mountain highways.

With torque peaking at 146 foot-pounds at 4,450 rpm, and a six-speed automatic, the Focus moved in sprightly fashion around slower cars and merged competently into traffic. At times, shift points were noticeable in the transmission, though.

Fuel economy was better than expected, given some aggressive driving. The test car averaged 32 miles per gallon in city/highway travel, the majority of which was highway driving. This translated into a notable travel range of nearly 400 miles on a single tank of regular gas.

Even the non-sporty, front-wheel drive Focus hatchback Titanium—albeit fitted with low-profile, high performance tires with good grip—showed its handling prowess. It clung to the pavement on curves and maintained its poise in an emergency avoidance maneuver.

With responsive, precise steering, the Focus test vehicle was fun to drive, even on a six-hour trip.

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