

MOTORING FOCUS: SKODA FABIA SE-L 1.2 TSI 90PS

Every Skoda Fabia comes with six airbags, stability control and oodles of safety kit. This includes a system that will brake the car if you get too close to the vehicle in front, and one that automatically applies the brakes after an accident to limit the scale of any ensuing collisions.



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This all helped the family-cosetting Fabia secure the highest possible five-star crash test rating from the experts at Euro NCAP.

Indeed, if you are after a new, inexpensive car, for you and your kids, then the Fabia challenges its closest contenders – the Volkswagen Polo and Ford Fiesta on cost. The Fabia is also economical to run and holds on to its value fairly well.

Inside, there is a good deal of space – particularly when it comes to head and legroom. The rear is large enough for two adults, or three small children, to be comfortable, and the boot has enough room for the weekly shopping and a buggy.

The cabin is a tad austere, though. Everything is uncluttered and tightly bolted together, but the slabs of black, unimaginative plastics, don't inspire you. On the plus side, the build-quality continues with the switchgear having a solid feel - and everything is simple to operate, too.

On SE models upwards, you get alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, a decent stereo, and a leather steering wheel. My test car came in SE-L trim, which adds cruise control, climate control, audio buttons on the steering wheel and a handy automatic dimming rear-view mirror.

The 89bhp 1.2 TSI model, under the spotlight here, is generally hushed and smooth. At motorway speed, wind noise is a bit of an irritation, specifically from around the windscreens pillars and the door mirrors, but it is not so bad that it's a deal-breaker.

The car also has quite a bit of low-down thrust, pulling hard in any gear. This means you don't need to thrash the Skoda to get it up to speed. The manual transmission is light and clear-cut, too, making the Fabia driving experience pleasurable, rather than a chore.

The Skoda Fabia's steering is sharp and agile enough to communicate what the front wheels are up to. The ride can get a little unsettled when the obligatory potholes appear, but otherwise the hatchback is fine - even handling the twisty bits keenly.

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 113 mph
- 0-62 mph: 10.9 secs
- Combined mpg: 60.1
- Engine layout: 1197cc, 4 cylinder, 16 valve petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 89
- Max. torque (lb.ft): 118
- CO₂: 107 g/km
- Price: £14,240

PROS 'N' CONS

- Pulls well ✓
- Equipment ✓
- Decent boot ✓
- Efficient ✓
- Wind noise X

All things considered, the Fabia is an entertaining, reliable, and largely refined little number – whether you are on the school run or taking your small family on holiday. And because the car has that five-star safety stamp of approval, this Skoda should protect you well if you are unfortunate enough to be in a collision.