



It's drivetime



Great motors are everywhere today – here are just a few that *Sorted's* motoring editor, Tim Barnes-Clay, has been driving since our last issue.

Suzuki Baleno

I ventured to Belfast recently to drive the new Suzuki Baleno – a sensible supermini with decent room inside. Bargain basement plastics litter the cabin, although it doesn't come cut-price. A fairly steep £12,999 buys the basic Baleno 1.0 SZ-T 5DR, but it does come well kitted-out. Factory-fitted equipment includes air conditioning, satnav, DAB radio and Bluetooth.

The Baleno's 1.0-litre turbocharged three-cylinder power unit makes 115ps and pulls the lightweight car along sufficiently. With a 0–62mph time of 11.4 seconds and a top speed of 124mph, it's by no means the fastest kid on the block, though. In many ways, the Baleno is like the academically challenged but eager school pupil, scoring A+ for effort and a D for performance.

But, in all fairness, driving pleasure isn't what Suzuki's Baleno is focusing

on. Lots of body roll underscored that point when I got a bit naughty trying to throw it around Northern Ireland's more twisty roads.

The Baleno's positive points really go back to the roominess factor; headroom is good for two six-foot tall rear passengers – and the same goes for legroom. The front is a similar story – and all seats are very supportive.

The spacious theme applies to the boot, too. It's more than big enough for the weekly shop as well as a pushchair, and the twin-level floor provides a virtually flat surface with the rear seats folded down. Economy is a plus point, too – the official combined fuel consumption averaging 62.7mpg.

Overall, the new Baleno is a grower – it won't set your world on fire – but it'll get you to your destination efficiently and in comfort. →

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Mazda MX-5

The latest Mazda MX-5 rocks. It really does. And it's not just me that thinks it; the awesome sports car has won a bunch of awards around the world, including 'Roadster of the Year' in Britain.

It's huge fun to drive, with alert, well-weighted steering and a composed feel through corners. This is because the fourth-generation model has an excellent power to weight ratio, rear-wheel drive, perfect 50:50 weight distribution and more comfort and tech than ever before.

The MX-5's lightweight petrol-powered engines deliver new heights of performance and economy. Across the line-up the MX-5 comes with alloy wheels, LED headlights, a leather steering wheel, as well as a sleek fabric hood.

Head straight for sport trim, as I did, and the car features rain-sensing wipers, rear parking sensors, smart keyless entry, Premium Bose Surround Sound and heated leather seats. It also benefits from a dynamic set-up that includes sports suspension. Its athleticism is highlighted further by 17-inch bright alloy wheels and body-coloured mirrors.

Equipped with the 2.0-litre 160ps power unit, the car will sprint from



0-62mph in 7.3 seconds and on to 133mph. It'll also achieve up to 40mpg on average. But perhaps the most amazing aspect of the MX-5 is that when the original model was launched in 1990, it cost £14,249 (equal to £31,687 in today's money),

yet quarter of a century later, with far more standard equipment, the basic all-new Mazda costs from £18,495. This means, more than ever, the MX-5 sets the benchmark as the one of the world's best and most affordable sports cars.



Fiat 500X

I drove Fiat's 500X in 2.0 Multijet 2 Automatic Cross Plus guise. The £26,315 diesel car is basically a larger version of the 500, with five doors and room for five-up. It's handsome – in a quirky way, and it's well screwed together.

This version of 500X is designed to go off-road, too, but on-road is where I had the most fun. Zero to 62mph arrives in 9.8 seconds and the car will top out at 118mph. That doesn't sound fast, but you can't fault the handling on twisty sections of tarmac; the car sticks to the road well and inspires confidence with every mile. It'll also return around 50mpg.



The Fiat's nine-speed automatic gearbox changes smoothly if you leave 'Sport' mode well alone. Hit said mode and the 500X holds on to the gears for too long with, seemingly, little extra forward motion.

The 'Normal' setting is all you need for everyday driving and the 'Off-Road' mode is nice to have if you need to head off-piste for any

reason. The furthest I took my test car was on to a muddy field just to see if the 500X could cope. It did – scrabbling its way across without any issue.

There are lots of combinations for the 500X – and they're not all as pricey as the 2.0 Multijet 2 Automatic Cross Plus, so there's more than likely a 500X out there to meet your requirements.

SEAT Ibiza ST FR

If you feel comfortable driving small hatchbacks but you really need a little bit more room, then SEAT's Ibiza Sports Tourer (estate) is a good compromise. I drove the top-of-the-range performance-focused 'FR' model trim, costing £15,635.

To be fair, 'performance' might be overstating things, as the car's 1.2 TSI, 110ps petrol engine only does 0-62mph in 9.7 seconds and has a top speed of 122mph. In spite of these lacklustre figures, the SEAT is quite entertaining to drive, with respectable handling and alert steering. The sports suspension in the FR cuts out body roll nicely, but the price to pay for this is a stiff ride.

The Ibiza ST FR will do up to 54mpg, so it's economical – and it does look the business, too – especially if you opt for SEAT's colour packs. These add paint detail to mirror surrounds and wheels, and carry over to the cabin, with the air vents, handbrake, seats and



steering wheel also being offered in a variety of shades.

Overall, the Sports Tourer delivers an extra dose of practicality, giving the ever-popular Ibiza an even wider appeal – even if the 1.2 TSI engine can't quite deliver the pulling power that the 'FR' badge on this test model suggests. →



Volvo S60 D3 R-Design

Volvo has never had the same appeal as its German cousins. It has at no time looked as aggressive as Audi, nor as brutal as BMW, or as mean as Mercedes-Benz. But that's a good thing.

The Swedish marque does things its own way and that's at the very heart of why some British drivers opt for Volvo – even though they could, for the same coinage, afford something a little sexier.

Take the S60; it's very much a thinking man's car. And that's not to say that Teutonic motors don't attract clever people. It offers some of the most restful, supportive and sumptuous seats on the automotive market. Chairs you can imagine a college professor sinking into before lighting his pipe and mulling over the day's events. It's the kind of car he'll then cruise back home in while listening to Classic FM.

The S60 is by no means dreary, though; it can still satisfy your pleasure sensors. Let's face it, Scandinavian design is generally pleasing. Step inside, and the easy-to-use controls contribute to an 'in-command' driving experience. The overall effect is warm and tranquil, like being in a Swedish house on a cold night.



The S60 looks particularly fetching in sporty R-Design guise, as tested here in £32,045 Lux Manual form. This is the trim level that adds suspension upgrades as well as design touches.

On the move, the car has lots of power and torque. This means it pulls well in all gears. Indeed, it feels quicker (0–62mph in 9.0 seconds / top speed 134mph) than the black and white stats show and, perhaps more importantly, it returns an official combined mpg of 72.4. Economical, or what?



Ford S-MAX

The new S-MAX is a people carrier with a difference: it looks good and it drives dynamically. These are two attributes not often associated with these kind of practical machines.

The S-MAX is really for the mum or dad who can't bear to see an ugly seven-seater on their drive – or parked outside their house – hence the car's sporty leanings.

The latest model, launched last year, has a longer bonnet – but otherwise looks similar to the old

one. It's inside where things have changed – comfort has been given priority. The front seats are wide and well-stuffed; the middle row can alternate between really spacious and a tad constrained, depending on whether there are passengers in the third row. These rearmost chairs offer little legroom, so are best suited to children.

Behind the wheel, the S-MAX really makes you feel at one with the road. The £28,095 2.0 TDCi 150 Titanium,

driven here, pulls well and the steering is direct. The handling characteristics give it a more involving drive than might be expected, or at least until its bulk eventually overpowers its poise. Zero to 62mph is achieved in 10.8 seconds; the maximum speed is 123mph and the combined fuel economy is 56.4mpg.

As well as space, there are loads of practical qualities on the S-MAX that add to its helpfulness for parents. From the cupholders that stop tall bottles wobbling about to the cubbyholes where loose change can be stored, the Ford S-MAX is a handy machine for everyday life with children.





Nissan Navara NP300

The new Navara NP300 is more like a car than ever before. Inside, the pick-up is similar to Nissan's X-Trail SUV, and upgrades to its suspension make the driving experience far less of a chore.

The Navara comes in King-Cab and Double-Cab formats, with the Double-Cab likely to account for 95% of all British sales. I drove the latter in £30,795 TEKNA guise, fitted with leather on the inside and a twin-turbo dCi 190 engine under the bonnet.

On the road, the Navara can't mask its size, but its steering is well-weighted and, unusually for a pick-up, there's hardly any bounce or body roll over rough services or through corners.

Being a heavy lump of metal, the Nissan isn't fast – even with 190ps and 450Nm of torque at hand. 62mph from a standing start takes 10.8 seconds and the Navara will eventually thunder all the way to 112mph. Fitted with a seven-speed automatic transmission, as my test vehicle was, the NP300 has an official combined fuel economy figure of 40.3mpg and CO₂ emissions of 183g/km. That's not bad at all.



Being a pick-up, the Navara's main talent is, of course, load lugging. It can handle a 1,052kg payload, which in layman's terms is about 2.2 cubic metres of wood. The Nissan also has a 3,500kg maximum towing capacity, should you need to extract the most out of this hardy, yet pleasingly car-like, workhorse.

Tim is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit carwriteups.co.uk.

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