

## ROAD TEST - Ford Ka 1.2 Zetec

The previous version of the Ford Ka was remarkable in two respects, firstly the sheer length of time Ford kept building it for (12 years) and secondly because it was still better than most of its rivals when they stopped making it. It was a car that invented its own niche, the sub-supermini, and it kept selling for all those years because its perky looks never aged, it was surprisingly spacious, was great to drive and extremely cheap to buy. It took the other main stream manufacturers years to realise this was a good sector to exploit; the Toyota Aygo made a decent fist of it but, if the Fiat 500 hadn't have come along, Ford would be selling a 13 year old version of the Ka today.

Of course, the Fiat 500 did come along and so Ford have been forced to build an all new version of the Ka. Ironically, or sensibly depending on which way you look at it, the new Ka is based on the platform of the Fiat 500. This could make a lot of sense, the cute looks of the Fiat coupled with the dynamic excellence and build quality of Ford. My question is, has everything gone to plan?

Starting with the styling, all is well. The Ka is an attractive, perky little car. It has the puppy like proportions of the Fiat and still manages to carry over many of the styling cues of the old car. I like the headlights, the flared wheel arches and the way the wheels fill the arches. The only problem is, if you put it next to the Fiat it just looks like smallest car in the Ford range whereas the Fiat is a one off retro masterpiece. The interior is eerily similar to the Fiat but that's no bad thing, the Fiat has a really cool interior that's also very practical and surprisingly comfortable. Somehow, the Ford manages to get a larger boot.

Never mind, let's start playing to Ford's strengths, the ride and handling. The old car was like the original Mini; it had a wheel at each corner, you could chuck it into bends and it was terrific fun to drive. The ride was a little bumpy but acceptable for such a small car. Sadly, the new Ka is much like the Fiat in the way it handles; it grips well but there is precious little feel either through the chassis or the steering and it doesn't really involve you as a driver. The ride is more



composed than the old one but is nothing to write home about.

Where the old car really fell down was with the engine. Most of them had a 1.3 litre petrol lump that probably first saw service in the model T. It was weedy, noisy and horribly thirsty with many owners reporting 30 mpg in daily use. The new 1.2 Zetec engine is a world apart. The 67bhp it boasts will not get many pulses racing but it delivers the power low down and is actually quite peppy to drive. It is also refined and extremely economical – I managed 52mpg with a lot of town driving in the mix.

Don't get me wrong, the Ford is a good little car and I liked it a lot. It doesn't really have enough room in the back but, other than that, I couldn't find fault with it. It's just that it doesn't have that indefinable X Factor that the Fiat has. If the Fiat is Brad Pitt, then the Ford is his brother. Somehow, I don't think this new Ka will still be a strong seller in 10 years time.

If I had just under eight grand and was in the market for a funky little new car, I'd buy the Fiat. If I was buying a used one three years down the line I'd get the Ford. Simple!

**Kit Johnson**