

**Auto
EXPRESS**

**NEW
CAR
HONOURS
1999**

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FORD FOCUS



CAR OF THE YEAR

SUPREME HONOUR



Interior (below) and exterior both have outstanding design



FORD FOCUS

What makes a winner:

In this category, our victor can offer an outstanding combination of space, quality, performance, dynamic ability, safety and style – all at the right price

WHEN Ford launched the Focus, it knew exactly what the competition would be. New generations of its two big rivals, Vauxhall's Astra and the Volkswagen Golf, were already on the scene and looking mighty impressive.

Two prime tasks lay ahead. The Focus had to take on the mantle of the Escort, one of the best-known names in the business, and it had to at least equal the very best which the compact sector had to offer. Expectations were more than high, not least because of Ford's recent successes, such as its Mondeo, Ka and Puma. Would the Focus be on a par with—or better than—the likes of those? The short answer is yes, which is why it wins our Compact Family Honour.

Ford's new hatchback impressed us from the moment we first opened its doors. The styling is radical for a volume seller wearing the blue oval badge but, if the ghost of the Escort was to be laid to rest, it had to be. Don't for one moment

see the Focus as just an evolution of the Escort—it is a completely new car which outshines the old stager in every way. And now, there's more than the hatchback to consider, as saloon and estate models were launched earlier this year.

Settle into the comfortable yet supportive driver's seat, adjust it to suit your frame—similarly, the steering wheel—and you quickly feel at ease.

The amount of work which Ford has put into the interior is obvious from the outset—only the Golf can trump it on quality of finish, and that is no bad reflection on the Focus. The fascia is logically and clearly laid out, with nothing complicated or hidden away. Neat touches, such as the boot release beside the instrument binnacle, are evident throughout the car. There's plenty of space inside for people, and a good-sized boot for their luggage. The rear seat splits and folds for added flexibility, although that's now expected in this market. A

choice of four 16-valve petrol engine options power the Focus, ranging from 1.4 to 2.0-litres. All of them are lively motors which offer solid performance and give the Ford a decent turn of speed. With no true sports models available as yet, the emphasis is on all-round capability rather than outright speed, yet the Focus is far from dull. Refinement is impressive until you stray towards the red line, which means the vast majority of drivers will be more than happy with its performance.

There is also one diesel engine—a turbocharged 1.8-litre unit—which is a huge improvement over Ford's previous oil-burners regarding both performance and refinement. Whichever engine option you choose, the Focus is remarkably easy to drive. Controls are light and responsive but have a firm, linear action. The power-assisted steering is direct and easy on the arms, but gives an enthusiastic driver plenty of

feedback. Indeed, this is an example of one of the car's main attractions. Whether you are a driver who just wants to get from A to B or a would-be Colin McRae, the Ford goes about its business in an assured and competent manner.

Dynamically, the Focus leads the compact class. It is also one of the most precise and satisfying mass-market hatchbacks ever. Ford should be very pleased that it has managed to give the car a combination of spirit and true ability without detracting from its everyday, user-friendly nature.

In the areas of handling, ride and interior space, the Focus leaves others trailing. Performance from the Zetec engines is good and, even if you don't particularly like the styling, you must surely accept there are those who will love it. Ergonomically, the Ford is up there with the best and, if it doesn't quite match the Golf for quality of materials and finish, it's a close-run thing. What's more, such

SUPREME HONOUR

AWARD

CAR OF THE YEAR



In tune with you: Focus interior details and controls are both stylish and practical



1.8-litre engine is one of four petrol options. There is also a 1.8-litre turbodiesel

FORD FOCUS

WITH so many excellent cars winning individual honours, selecting the Auto Express Car of the Year was never going to be easy. We aren't naïve enough to think any one car will satisfy the needs of every driver but, when one comes close, it deserves the rewards.

That's why the Ford Focus enters the new century with the Auto Express Supreme Honour tucked under its seatbelt. We make no apologies for choosing a car from the compact family category for the second year running – the 1998 Honour went to Vauxhall's Astra – after all, this sector accounts for a third of UK new car sales.

The Focus is an accomplished, superbly executed all-rounder offering space, comfort, performance and refinement.

That it drives with an enthusiast's passion is a bonus. If you are after a mid-sized hatch, it has to be on your list. And if you haven't driven a Ford lately, you may be surprised how 'focused' the marque has become...

unseen but vital aspects of a car as safety, security and ease of access haven't been ignored. It matched the best in its class in recent NCAP crash tests, and boasts Ford's latest security. We particularly liked such features as the 'driver's door only' unlock, fitted in addition to the usual alarm and immobiliser.

Choosing a winner in the compact family sector was far from easy – the Astra and Golf are both excellent cars – but, in the end, the sheer strength of the Focus's attractions and ability saw it through. Goodbye Escort, hello Focus – a new people's champion has arrived.

Price range: £13,000 – £16,000

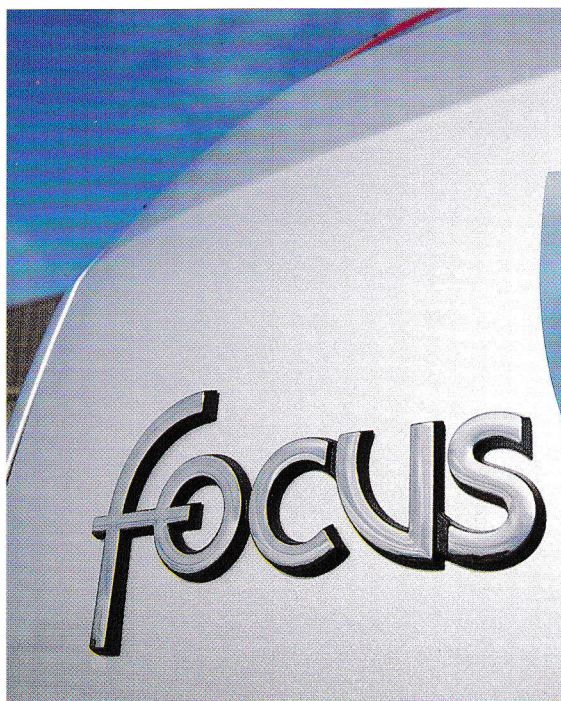
Engines: 1.4, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0-litre petrol, 1.8-litre turbodiesel

Body style: Three/five-door hatchback, four-door saloon, five-door estate

Favourite model: 1.6 Zetec

How much? £13,000

How fast? 115mph; 0-60mph: 10.9secs



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**Auto
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some great cars entered the 1999
auto express car of the year award.
any other year they might have won.

expect**more**



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1999

don't take our word for it, book your own test drive. the new ford**focus**

