



Change your
expectations
forever

- Saloon, estate and diesel engine add to Car of the Year range
- Ka, Fiesta and Focus grab honours
- Focus laps up the Road to Hell

WHAT CAR?
AUTOCAR
REPRINT

Please see back cover



Focus makes new rear revolution

Ford Focus saloon/estate
PRICES £15,500/£16,000
 (2.0 Ghia)
ON SALE Now



Ford might have redefined the family hatchback with the Focus, but it isn't

simply resting on its laurels. It could easily have done; it has already taken 100,000 orders for three and five-door models. But instead, Ford is looking to compound its rivals' problems with saloon and estate variants.

Just like its Vauxhall Astra equivalent, the Focus saloon is aimed squarely at an older audience. Ford likes to call them empty nesters. Accordingly, this car isn't as bold a style statement as the hatchback.

Grafting on a boot hasn't done the Focus any favours in the looks department. It is now 210mm longer and loses the purposeful wheel-at-each-corner stance of its hatchback cousin. And the high roof that makes the hatch trendy and practical gives the saloon a slightly frumpy look. But it's a neat design and doesn't look ungainly like it used to in the Escort.

Older drivers prefer a more



Fake wood at odds with bold design

compliant ride than ultimate grip, so Ford has softened the rear springs to suit. In reality the difference is virtually imperceptible. Perhaps the rear bulkhead adds enough rigidity to offset the new spring rates.

The saloon shares the hatchback's inspired road manners. It steers, rides and



Bootlid can be released from cabin

handles better than Vauxhall's Astra saloon, itself a very competent vehicle.

Emphasising the shift towards refinement, Ford will sell you a saloon only with the luxury Ghia specification, which includes air conditioning and a CD player in an already impressive list of equipment.



Rear design neat rather than bold

Cosmetic changes include an unsightly slab of wood on the dash and chrome above the rear number plate. Along with the traditional Ghia badges, this is jewellery that panders to the needs of the gentleman motorist but simultaneously negates some of the Focus's modern feel.

Interior dimensions are identical to the hatchback, so the four-door leads the class for sheer space. The boot is huge and access easy through a wide opening and low sill.

The Focus hatch and saloon might have the roomiest cabin in their class, but the new estate is bigger still.

The Focus had two helpful advantages before it began the transformation into an estate: the longest wheelbase in the class (2615mm) and a high roofline (1430mm). It is no

Saloon is 210mm longer than hatch; rear springs revised for softer ride





Saloon available in Ghia spec only; estate comes in Zetec, LX and Ghia



Same petrol engines as hatches



Focus king of small saloons/estates

surprise, then, that coupled with a redesigned rear suspension system and a raised roofline, the Focus estate is comprehensively bigger than its rivals in every area. So capacious is this small estate that it feels as roomy as cars from the class above.

By repositioning the top suspension and damper mounts, the chassis engineers have kept suspension intrusion into the luggage area to an absolute minimum. Up above, that roofline has been raised 17mm over the hatchback and extends so far back that the tailgate is nearly vertical.

Clever triple-rate springs overcome any deterioration in handling and ride to the extent that the unladen estate feels nearly identical to the five-door hatch, despite a 41kg

penalty from all the extra metal and glass.

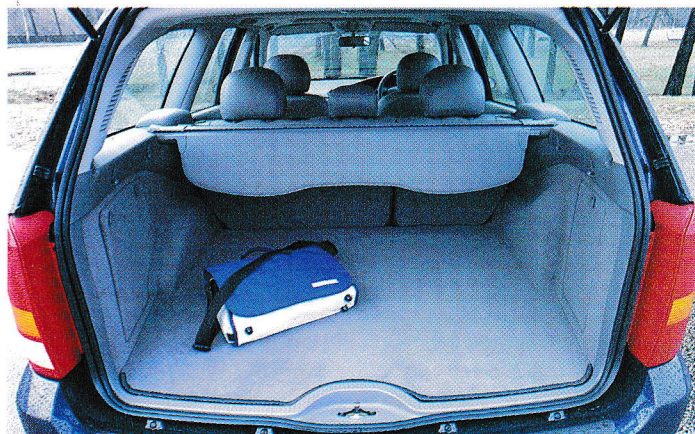
Fitted with the 128bhp 2.0-litre engine, this is a mildly sporty estate car. Strange, then, that it never feels much quicker

than the 1.8 version. The simple answer is that the extra torque of the 2.0-litre unit necessitates fewer gearchanges, so the driver isn't trying as hard. Hold on to each gear longer, though, and the extra performance is noticeable. The engine note hardens, too; the motor has been designed to be more vocal under large throttle inputs and remain mute at other times.

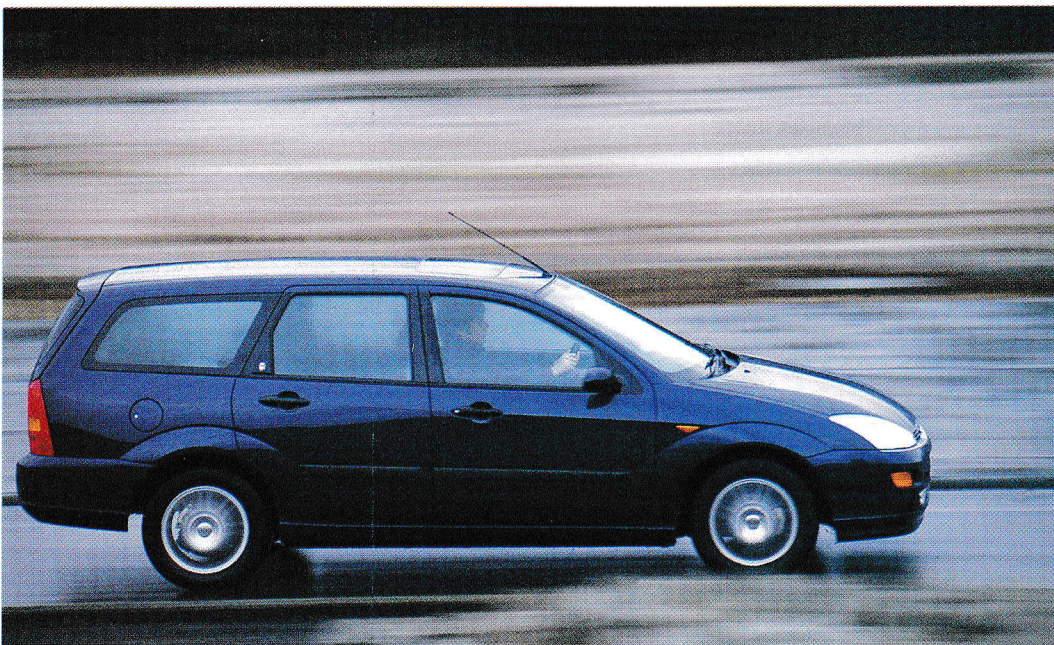
Choosing a Focus couldn't be easier. The saloon is the same price as the equivalent five-door hatchback and the estate is £500 more. That means a price range of £14,500 for the 1.6 saloon to £16,000 for a 2.0 estate.

These are two talented additions to the Focus range. The saloon may lack a little style, but it will impress anyone looking for a small four-door. Prospective buyers of small MPVs shouldn't overlook the estate variant. It offers bags of useable space and remains fun to drive.

Chris Harris



Revised rear suspension helps to provide a big, well-shaped cargo area



Estate's roofline raised 17mm over already tall hatch and saloon. Ride and handling remain as terrific as ever

FACTFILE

FORD FOCUS 2.0 GHIA SALOON, ESTATE

HOW MUCH?

Price £15,500 (4dr), £16,000 (estate)

On sale in UK Now

HOW FAST?

0-62mph 9.3sec

Top speed 123mph

HOW THIRSTY?

Urban 23.9mpg

Extra urban 39.2mpg

Combined 33.2mpg

HOW BIG?

Length 4362/4438mm

Width 1699/1699mm

Height 1430/1477mm

Wheelbase 2615/2615mm

Weight 1160/1197kg

Fuel tank 55 litres

ENGINE

Layout 4 cyls in line, 1989cc

Max power 128bhp at 5750rpm

Max torque 128lb ft at 3750rpm

Specific output 64bhp per litre

Power to weight 112bhp per tonne

Installation Transverse, front, front-wheel drive

Made of Alloy head, iron block

Bore/stroke 84.8/88mm

Compression ratio 10:1

Valve gear 4 per cyl, dohc

Ignition and fuel Sequential electronic fuel injection

GEARBOX

Type 5-speed manual

Ratios/mph per 1000rpm

1st 3.42/5.2 **2nd** 2.14/8.3

3rd 1.45/12.2 **4th** 1.03/17.2

5th 0.77/23.1 **Final drive** 4.06

SUSPENSION

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs and dampers, anti-roll bar

Rear Multi-link, coil springs and dampers, anti-roll bar

STEERING

Type Rack and pinion, power assisted

Lock to lock 2.9

BRAKES

Front 258mm ventilated discs

Rear 253mm discs

WHEELS AND TYRES

Size 6Jx15in

Made of Alloy

Tyres 195/60 R15

All figures are manufacturer's claims

VERDICT

Focus moves goalposts for small saloons and estates. As impressive as hatch.



Improved 1.8 diesel engine
available across Focus range

Ford plays catch-up with DI diesel

Ford Focus 1.8 diesel

PRICE £13,350

ON SALE Now



Ford is expecting great things from its new direct injection diesel engine, the last of Ford's recently revised four-cylinder engines to come on line. The company is confident that its promise of cleaner emissions and improved torque from the 1.8-litre turbo diesel will account for 25 per cent of sales throughout the Focus range.

Traditionally, Ford has been one step behind the opposition in its diesel engine technology. That's hardly the case with this engine; direct fuel injection and advanced electronic management bring it right up to date. But it's hardly new; rivals

such as Alfa Romeo, Mercedes-Benz and Peugeot have had common rail direct injection diesels for the past 18 months.

The sophisticated electronics (as opposed to the rudimentary mechanical fuel injection metered through an imprecise fuel pump used by previous generations of diesels) allow fuel to be injected precisely and directly into the combustion chambers for an efficient burn process. Ford claims the result is cleaner emissions and an 11 per cent increase in torque.

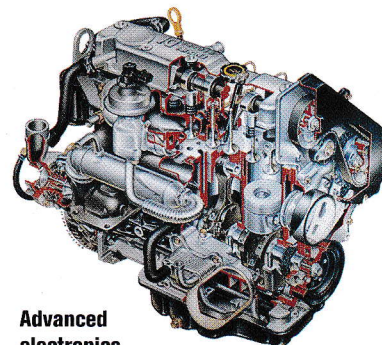
This isn't an entirely new engine; more an evolution of the old unit, whose 1753cc it shares. Power output is unchanged from 88bhp at 4000rpm. Torque rises almost 15lb ft to a peak of 147lb ft at the same 2000rpm.

The on-paper differences

may not be inspiring, but this oil-burner represents a substantial improvement over the old engine on the road, complementing the Focus's high level of refinement.

In addition to the new electronics, Ford has relocated and integrated the turbocharger into the exhaust manifold to reduce turbo lag for better throttle response.

The five-door TDi on test feels quicker than the claimed 0-62mph of 12.4sec suggests, possibly because the engine now

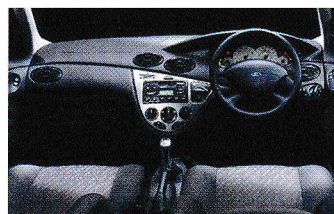


Advanced electronics
control direct fuel injection

even with such attention to detail, the diesel Focus isn't as smooth as the petrol variants.

However, the combination of an improved diesel engine and the Focus's impressive chassis makes for an accomplished car. The 1.8-litre diesel Focus's blend of performance, handling and economy is hard to beat.

Chris Harris



TDi shares petrol Focus interior

responds quicker to throttle inputs. There is meaningful thrust from 1500 to 3600rpm, after which power falls off near the 4800rpm limiter.

Ford claims an exceptional combined economy figure of 57.6mpg, so this should be the cheapest Focus to fuel.

A reduction in noise, vibration and harshness levels was achieved by fitting oil-filled engine mounts and by fixing the exhaust system at points fore and aft of the cabin area. But

Focus one of the more pleasurable family diesels to jostle through a bend



FACTFILE

0-62mph	12.4sec
Top speed	112mph
Combined mpg	57.6
Weight	1192kg

HOW BIG

Type	4 cys in line, 1753cc
Max power	88bhp at 4000rpm
Max torque	147lb ft at 2000rpm

All manufacturer's figures

VERDICT

Direct injection turbo diesel engine provides a superb blend of useable performance and low fuel consumption.

FORD FOCUS 1.8 ZETEC 5dr

PRICE £13,350
TESTED 28.10.98

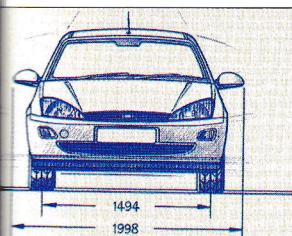
The best car that we road tested all year was not a 200mph supercar or a fiery quasi-rally car, but a humble but frankly extraordinary Ford Focus. This is the car that redefines class standard, providing

the family driver with a combination of sporting agility, luxury car refinement and mechanical integrity that is unique in our book, even with rivals as well rounded as the new Volkswagen Golf to contend with.

The Focus is so complete



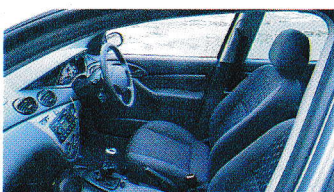
...other family hatch rides or handles better. Nothing looks like it, either



FORD FOCUS 1.8 ZETEC

HOW MUCH?	
Price	£13,350
Test date	28.10.98
HOW FAST?	
0-30mph	3.0sec
0-60mph	9.5sec
0-100mph	30.5sec
0-70mph	9.6sec
Land qtr mile	17.1sec/81mph
Land km	31.2sec/101mph
0-50mph in 4th	8.5sec
0-70mph in top	12.7sec
Top speed	118mph
0-100mph	2.8sec
Noise at 70mph	75dB(A)
Test weight	1223kg
HOW THIRSTY?	
Overall test average	29.2mpg
Driving route	40.0mpg
ENGINE	
Layout	4 cys in line, 1796cc
Max power	114bhp at 5750rpm
Max torque	116lb ft at 3750rpm
Specific output	63bhp/litre
Power to weight	93bhp/tonne
GEARBOX	
Top gear	5-speed manual
Top gear	22.7mph/1000rpm

VERDICT ★★★★★
Best family car yet. Strong performance, looks, amazing chassis and keen prices make Focus unbeatable right now.



Focus sets standard for cabin space



Strong performance from 1.8 engine

Looking for big thrills? Go for smaller Cougar

Ford Cougar 2.0 16v

PRICE £20,000
ON SALE Now



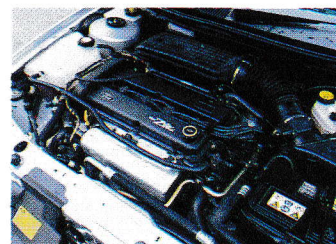
It's obvious that our angular friend the Ford Cougar is something of an attention seeker. But there's one model which may be somewhat overshadowed in Ford showrooms by its smooth-talking V6 sibling; the Cougar 2.0 16v.

Like the 2.5-litre version, the Cougar 2.0 takes its powerplant from the Mondeo. But unlike its bigger brother's V6, the four-cylinder engine has undergone some major changes in the transition. Power and torque have stayed at 128bhp and 130lb ft, but structural changes – including a ladder frame between the crankcase and sump, new valve materials and lightweight pistons – have reduced engine noise by a claimed 50 per cent and improved refinement.

Which makes an excellent engine even better. A 0-62mph time of 10.3sec doesn't sound startling, but numbers do nothing to convey the smoothness and free-revving nature of the powerplant. Or how well it blends into the Cougar's mechanical make-up: great gearchange, sharp steering and a beautifully flowing chassis.

Granted, at £20,000 it undercuts the V6 model by a mere £1000; add another £1000 and you get the V6 with more kit. Tempting.

But that's assuming the V6 is the better car. Which it isn't necessarily. What the 2.0-litre Cougar loses in outright



Free-revving engine from Mondeo



Cabin identical to 2.5-litre version

performance it gains in driver entertainment.

The V6's power delivery seems a bit too subtle for such an accomplished coupe; the 2.0-litre four revels in hard work, which in turn gives you more opportunity to enjoy that slick gearchange and superb chassis. It's an interesting angle for Cougar buyers to consider.

David Linklater

FACTFILE

0-62mph	10.3sec
Top speed	130mph
Combined mpg	34.0
Weight	1291kg

ENGINE

Type	4 cys in line, 1998cc
Max power	128bhp at 5600rpm
Max torque	130lb ft at 4000rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual

VERDICT

Hard to look past tempting price of the V6 version, but the 2.0-litre engine allows more of the Cougar's natural talent to shine.

Beefy, stylish exterior owes more to Puma than Ford's old Probe coupe



Smallhatch



WINNER

Ford Focus 1.6 LX 5dr, £14,000
Rewriting the small hatch rule book

What we were looking for Jack of all trades that is equally attractive to private and fleet users. Car whose styling, versatility and practicality are class-leading

FORD FO



CUS

EVERY so often a car comes along which has things cut and dried as soon as it turns a wheel. The Focus is one such. It offers nothing you won't find in other good small hatchbacks; but it does it all – or most of it – much, much better than the rest.

And it's brave for a volume car from a traditionally conservative manufacturer like Ford. From its styling, seemingly constructed from interlocking triangulated pieces, to its independent rear suspension that's pressed (for cheapness) rather than cast, it refuses to kowtow to convention.

That's not to imply that Ford has gone out on a limb. First and foremost, this is a car for families and the variety of things families need cars for,' says Richard Parry-Jones, the Ford group vice-president in charge of product development. So, what you find in a Golf or an Astra or any other small hatch you also find in the Ford, but more cleverly done.

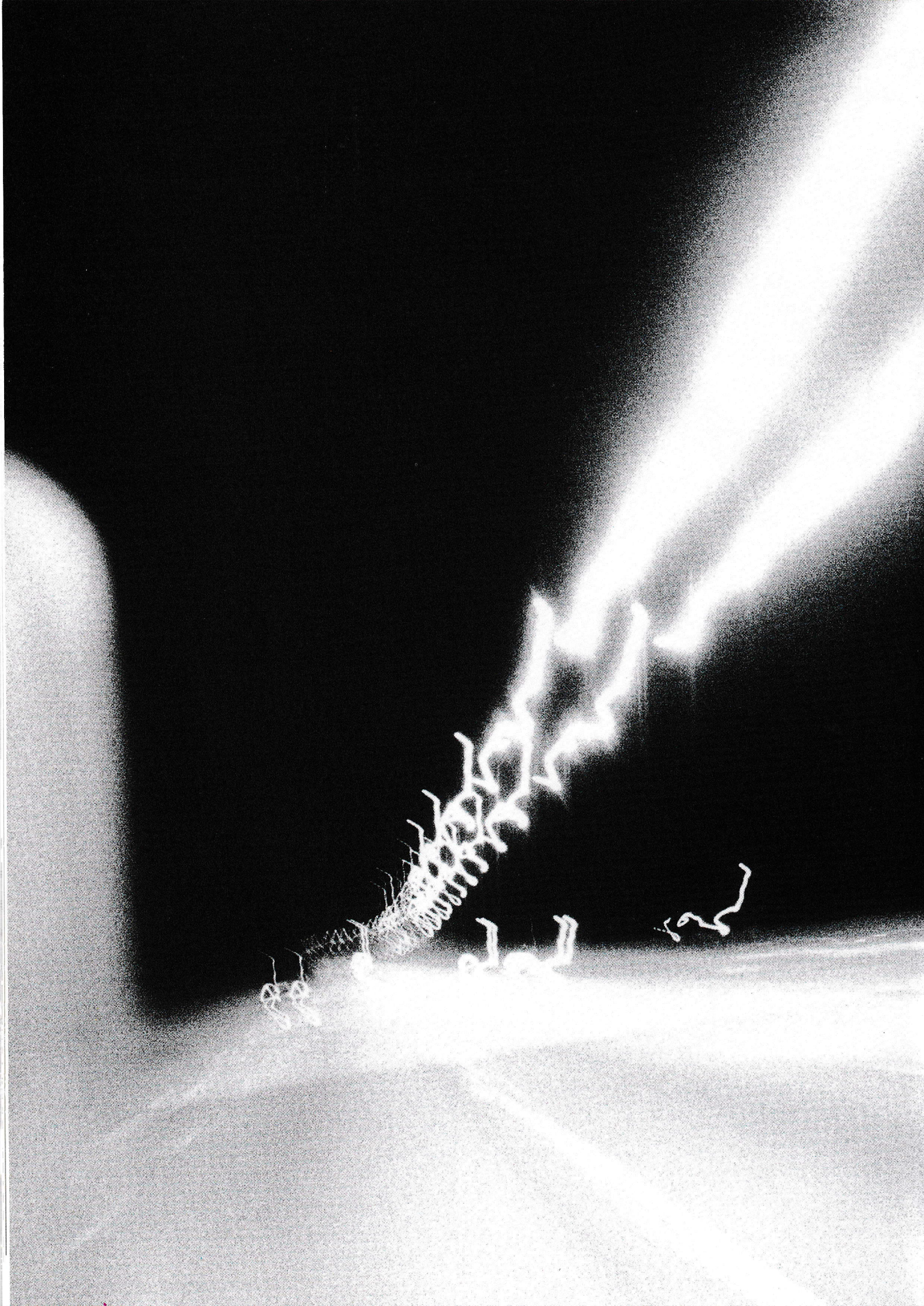
Just look at the cabin space front

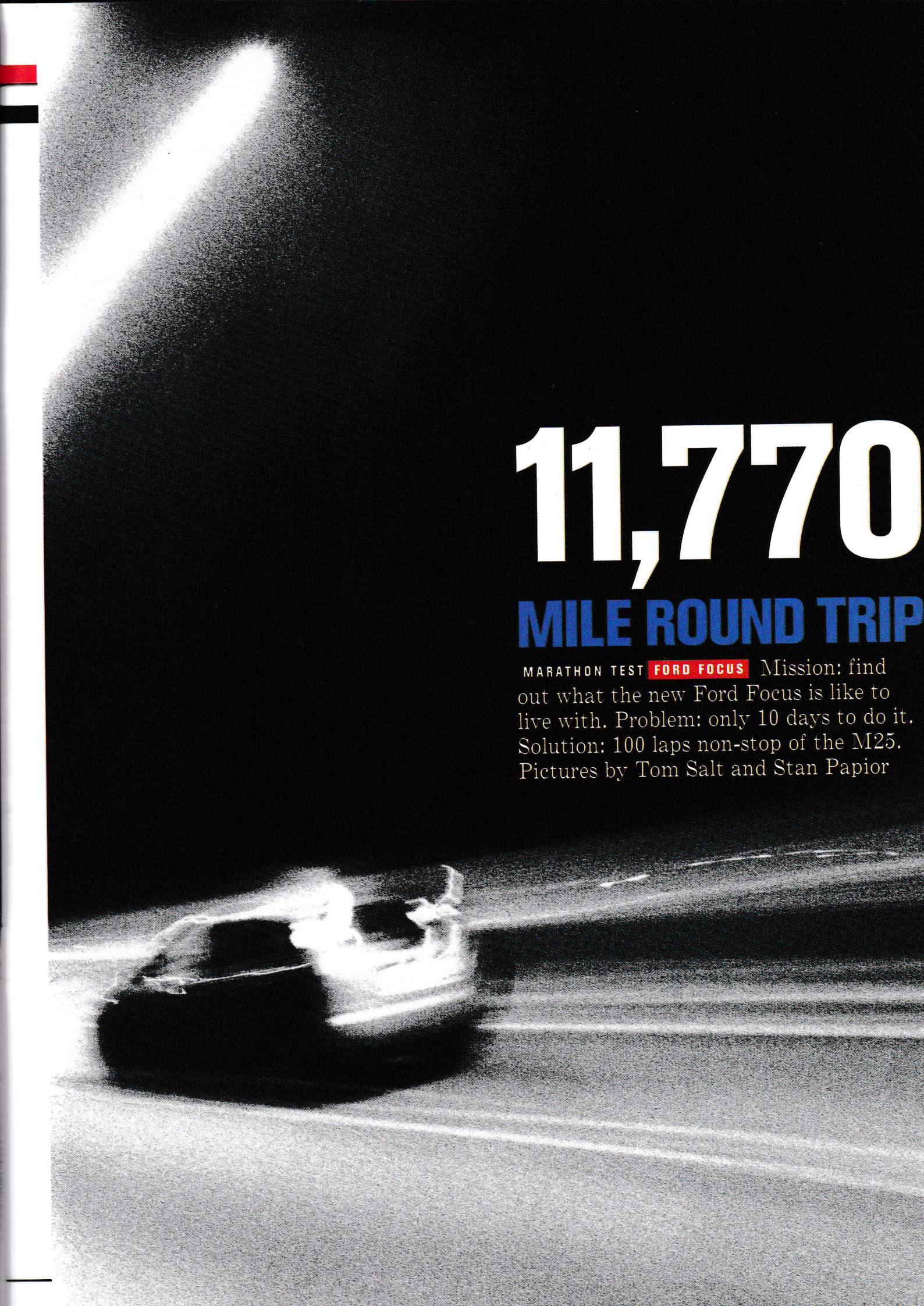
“OTHERS ARE AS ALERT, BUT MORE NERVOUS; OR AS SUPPLE, BUT MORE REMOTE”

and rear, the ease with which you can swap from five-seater to extended load carrier, and the user-sensitive design of that complex-looking dash. Safety and security provisions are top-notch, too, even if you do have to pay extra for some of them. A Golf has a more high-quality feel, but only until you turn the ignition key.

It doesn't matter what sort of driver you consider yourself, the Focus fits. It's new 1.6-litre engine is easy on the townie struggling to the office or supermarket, but just as capable of refined motorway cruising or rev-building charges down leafy lanes. Better still is the chassis, marvellous in the way it allows a quiet, controlled ride and brisk handling. Other hatches are as alert, but more nervous; or as supple, but more remote.

And you'll simply love using it, revelling in the control layout shaped by hours of study of what real drivers do in their cars, and the positioning of those less-frequently used items which are often tucked away in niggly locations. When we first tested the Focus we described it as a masterpiece. It's starting to look like we may have undersold it. ▶





11,770

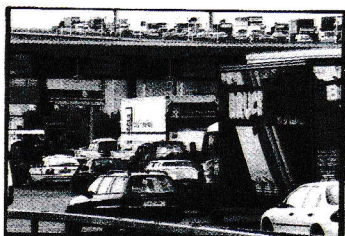
MILE ROUND TRIP

MARATHON TEST **FORD FOCUS** Mission: find out what the new Ford Focus is like to live with. Problem: only 10 days to do it. Solution: 100 laps non-stop of the M25. Pictures by Tom Salt and Stan Papior

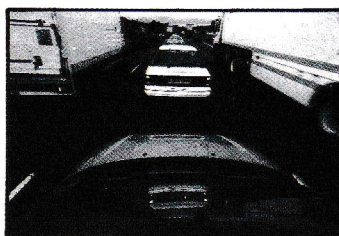
So now we know: the new Ford Focus is European Car of the Year. It is also one of only two cars to be awarded five stars this year in

an *Autocar* road test. We've driven it over hundreds of miles of major road, minor road, motorway and circuit.

But there were still things to find out about Ford's new hatchback. Such as its comfort over thousands of miles. Its ability to impress when the gloss of newness had worn off. Would we enjoy living with one – *in* one – over the sort of distance an owner would see in a year? We had only one car, a Focus 1.6 LX, and 10 days to find out. And that's when it started: 100 laps of the M25. Laps that would



Focus joins M25 rush hour, where motorists are able to do anything but rush



include high speeds, low speeds, heavy winds, driving rain, jams... and more jams. Now, 11,770 miles later, we give you another side of the Focus. Just don't ask us to do it again.

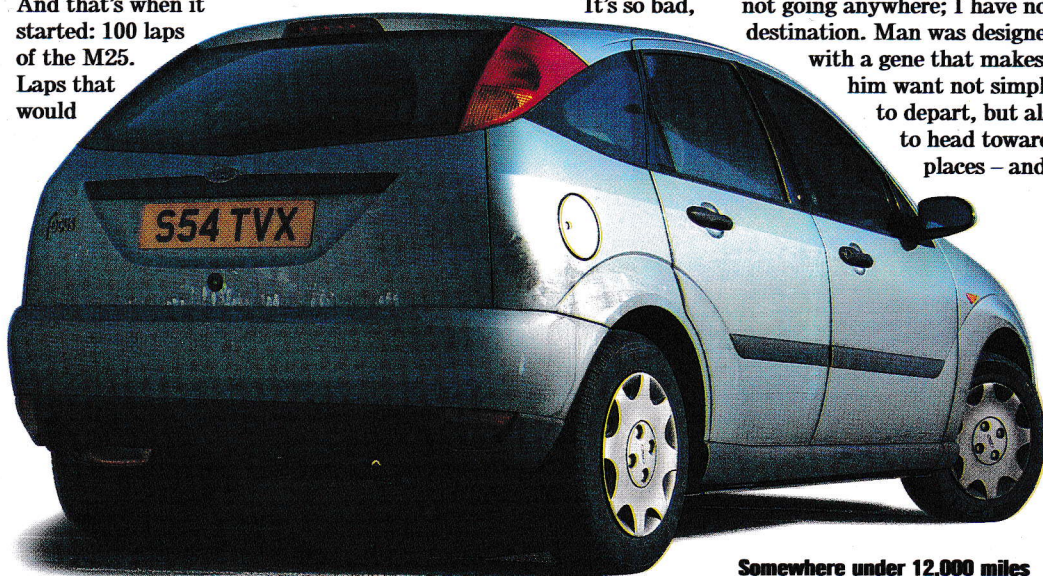
STEPHEN SUTCLIFFE

Three hours and 23 minutes. To do one solitary 117.7-mile lap of this wretched road. Not good. Not good at all.

It's so bad,

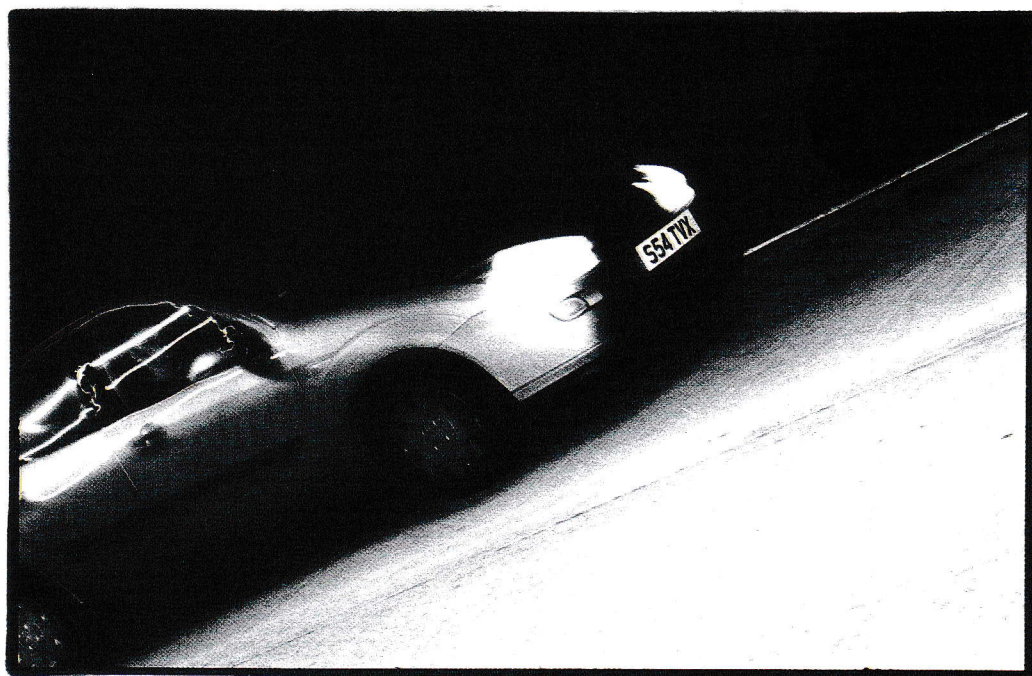
in fact, that I realise it is pointless attempting another lap before the baton is handed on. I simply won't make it around in time. So I call the office and arrange for the next in line to meet me on the opposite side to the one agreed. That way we might meet up some time today.

One hour of my six-hour morning stint to go and I realise what the real problem is. I'm not going anywhere; I have no destination. Man was designed with a gene that makes him want not simply to depart, but also to head towards places – and



Somewhere under 12,000 miles of grime is a green Ford Focus

"Three hours and 23 minutes to complete



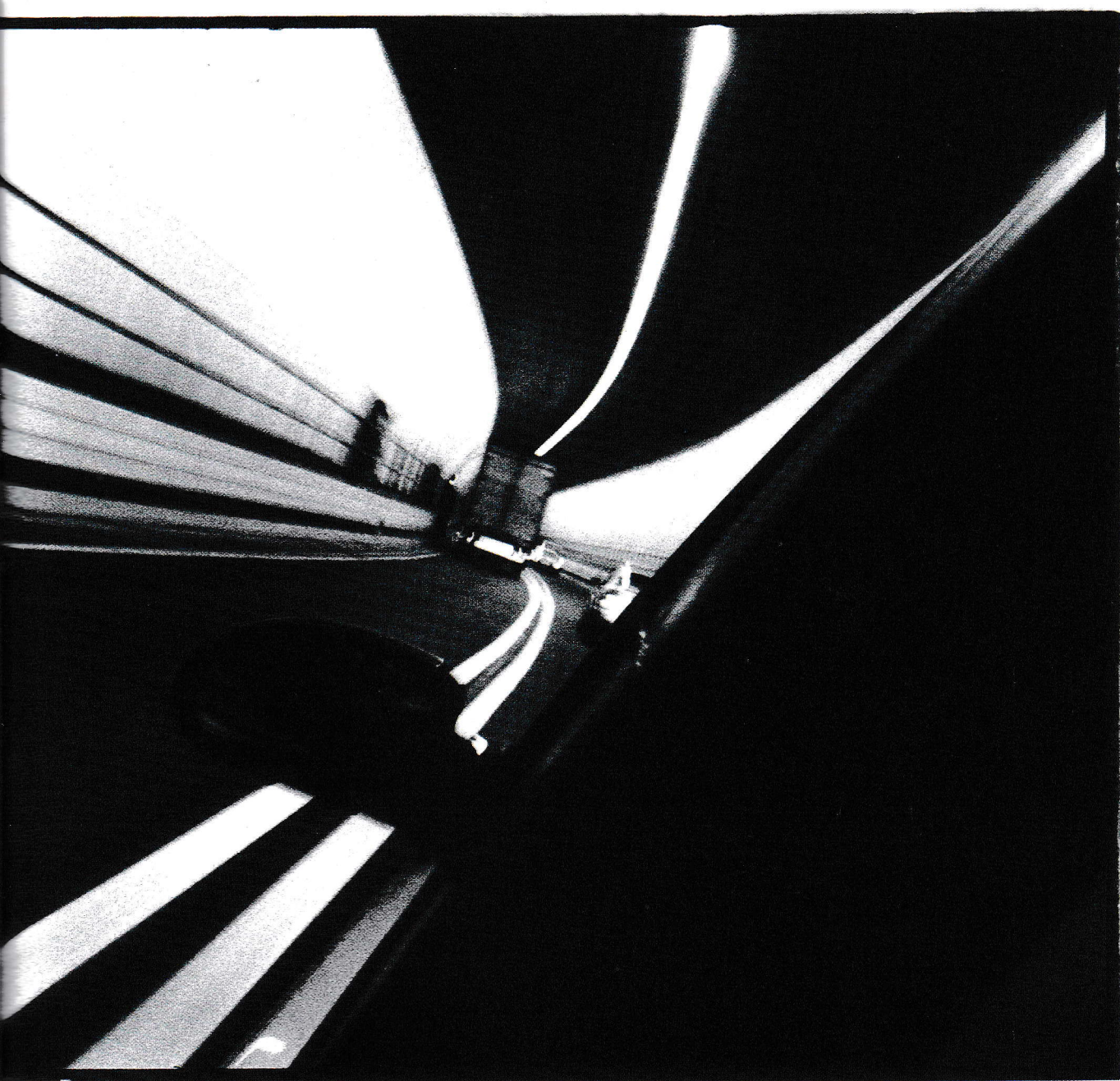
eventually arrive. Going around and around in circles results in a strong sense of aimlessness.

But it's my fault, I'm somewhat ashamed to admit. Editor Fuller said he wanted to accrue a huge mileage in the Focus and I, jokingly, suggested the 100-lap idea. I knew we were in trouble the



Focus had just 900 miles on the clock when we set out





ne solitary lap. Not good. Not good at all"

Instant I clocked his expression – that of a child desperate to hide his enthusiasm for a toy it quite clearly adores.

So here I am, chugging along at 30-50mph, admiring the stereo quality, the seat comfort, the ergonomic layout and, yes, even the doorbin size; anything to make this journey more interesting.

I quickly realise why people are gawping at me all the time. The Focus may well be a year old in mileage terms, but on the M25 it's a bewilderingly fresh shape.

Towards the end of my last half hour the traffic eases and starts to flow. The M25 regulars edge up behind, anxious to get down the road now that there's some

motion. And the Focus doesn't just blend, it excels. It's one of those cars for which people naturally tend to move over when it appears in the mirror.

Pretty handy when you've another 95 laps to do.

COLIN GOODWIN

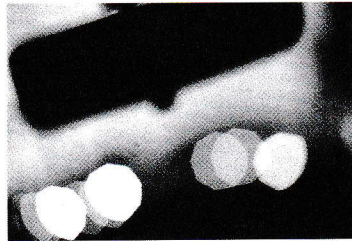
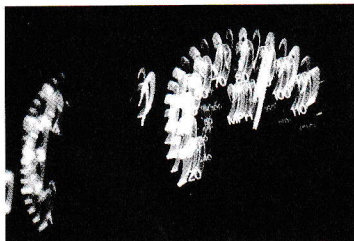
Never take a mobile phone on holiday. The office rang while I was enjoying a wet and cold Cornwall. "You don't know this, but we're driving a Ford Focus 12,000 miles around the M25 and you're doing 6am to 12pm tomorrow."

A cruel joke, obviously. Alas, no. The thought of six hours of snarling traffic jam is more than I can cope with, so I negotiate a swap and bag the midnight to 6am shift instead. Much better to ♦





Dartford toll bridge: another round and another pound. Electronic pass saved us from queues on later laps



Keeping alert presents a challenge during monotonous night-time driving

◆ circulate a deserted motorway for six hours.

But the major problem is resisting driving too quickly. There are more cameras around the M25 than outside Buckingham Palace when they're changing the guard. I attempt to stay between 80 and 85mph, which seems to be a safe and sensible speed, but the trouble is that the 1.6-litre Zetec SE is such a willing worker that it's all too easy to allow much more illicit figures on the

speedometer. The 1.6-litre Zetec is a totally new engine and – a first for Ford – it has an all-alloy construction. The block is very stiff, which is essential for reducing noise and vibration.

A big help for Goodwin's ears and sanity is the Focus's gearing. My 85-ish cruise requires a very relaxed 3750rpm from the engine in fifth.

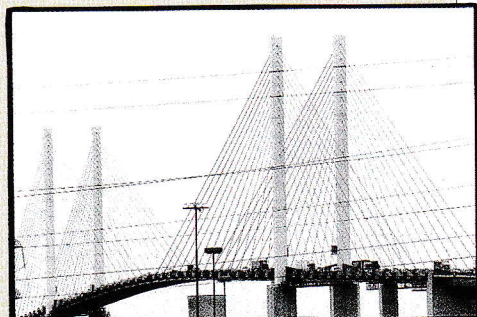
The first lap is the worst, because all the way around I'm thinking about the other three that I'll be doing. Having got

one in the

WHEN WORK STARTS TO TAKE ITS TOLL

Like his colleague in the main picture (left), Tom Spinks has seen it all from his Dartford toll booth over the past 13 years, including more than his fair share of violence. Traffic jam victims hold the likes of Tom fully responsible for their plight, as if their pound coin should pay for a red carpet passage through.

Drivers regularly collide with the toll barriers, only to claim that they didn't know they were there. Think you can follow that truck through without paying? Security will collar you immediately. Accidents are thankfully rare, but there have been fatalities. The high points? The cast of *Hi-de-Hi* and Henry Cooper passing through, and the all-important day off. Think of Tom as you tuck into your turkey this Christmas. He'll probably be hard at work defusing a ruck at the toll booth.



Accidents on bridge rare; road rage sadly not



bag, though, I feel a lot better.

Not only is the Focus's engine willing, it's also very smooth and quiet. Imagine the torture of a rattly tappet. You'd

hear it and then find it

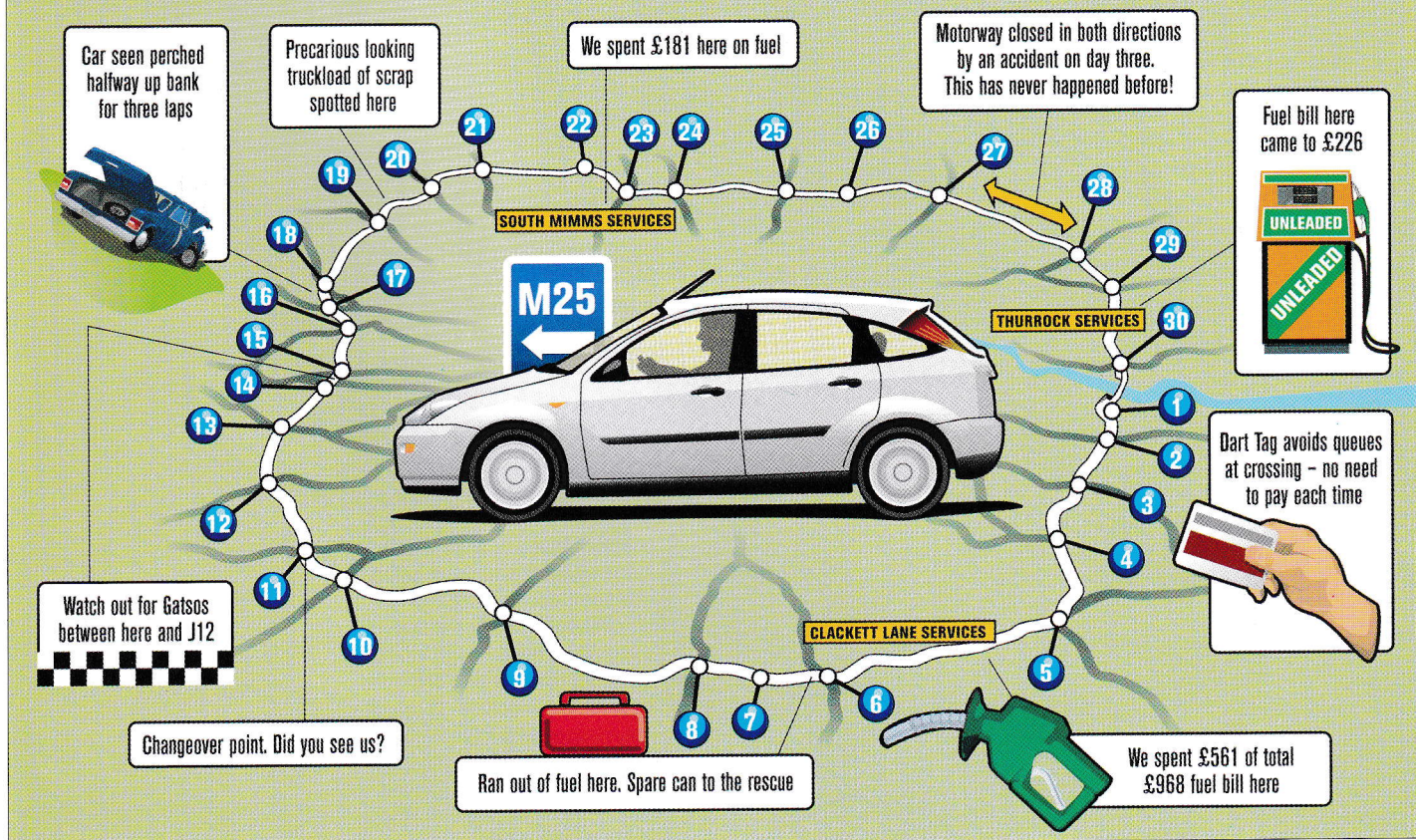
impossible to hear anything else.

Gearchanging points on an empty M25 are simple. Down through the gears at the bridge toll booths at Dartford, bung the pound coin in the basket and up through the 'box into fifth for another hour and a half. Marvellous; I'm driving a car with one of the smoothest gearchanges in the business and I hardly need to touch it.

ANDREW FRANKEL

We all manage fatigue in different ways. Some open ◆

FOCAL POINTS OF OUR M25 ADVENTURE



Superb refinement made long hours at wheel easier to bear



breadth of this car's ability; in another it is making a journey I expected to be distinguished only by unremitting tedium pleasant and almost special.

Offer me the same trip in this Focus or a Mercedes S600 with the stereo delete option and you'll need a crowbar to prise the Ford keys from my fingers.

GAVIN CONWAY

No question, the noon to six shift is the one to have. Dive onto the M25, slip into the lightly freckled traffic and get straight to cruising speed. Clear shot to Dartford, anti-clockwise and hell for leather.

Not more than five seconds after thwucking the door behind me, I have intimations of this cabin's goodness. Reaching out to undo the massive Radio 2 volume left by the previous pilot, I grope the volume

"Gearchanges on an empty M25 are simple

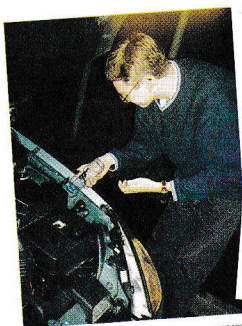
◆ windows and drive in a gale, others pinch themselves hoping pain will keep them awake. In this industry there are those who have driven flat-out simply to provide themselves with that uniquely invigorating brand of terror peculiar to road testers contemplating a loss of licence.

Me? I listen to terrible music. There's a special breed of dinosaur rock from the time when huge hair was considered a fair alternative to talent which I reserve for moments like this. Endure such unusual work at a sound level that makes your inner ear itch and in less than a minute your bleary-eyed stupor is replaced by the realisation that you will never

sleep again.

Until that moment comes, I'm wondering whether it is the seats, all-round visibility or ride quality which is most impressing me about the Focus. Then the eyelids start to droop, the CD comes out of the box and all such thoughts are cannoned out into the cold night air. This is impressive; I can feel sound gusting from the speakers by my legs, and I swear my ears distort before the speakers.

To be fair, the stereo



Early morning oil check for Focus; South Mimms services hit by fire



specification

comes from the options list, but then so does that in the Jaguar XJR I usually drive, and I know which one I'd rather listen to. I prefer the quantity and quality of the Focus's musical output.

Even in less exceptional circumstances, there are few components which have a greater effect on the driver's sense of well-being than the humble stereo, and the advances made over the last generation outshine almost every other area of automotive endeavour. If this test had happened 20 years ago our car would have been fitted with a push-button radio offering sound quality that varied between dreadful and risible depending on whether you wanted your ears offended by medium or long wave.

When you drive alone around a deserted M25, the stereo provides sole stimulus beyond the constant hum of the engine in your ears and the endless stripes of white paint before your eyes. In one respect, it represents simply further proof of the extraordinary





Radio the only company for solo driving stints; control set-up is excellent

control. Just the right fatness, with just the right grippy rubberiness.

Settle down for the long haul now. I reach-and-rake the steering wheel and minutely adjust the wing mirrors for distant-horizon work. The proximity of all the important Focus controls allows me to get my position absolutely spot on. But it's that obsessional attention to detail that gets me; even the mirror adjustment knob on the A-pillar is mounted



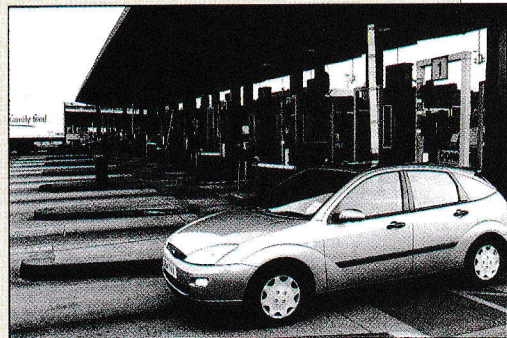
just high enough that you don't need to take your eyes off the road to know where it is.

An oversight, but it's my own. About to load up a talking book, pull the tape out, proffer it to the fascia – and realise that this is a CD-only coach.

So *Riding the Iron Rooster* will have to wait. Just as well, as there's a bit going on. Approaching the Dartford Tunnel and on the other side, a silver Merc SL has expensively but harmlessly kissed the

DARTFORD CROSSING: UNDER AND OVER

On 28 August this year 169,098 vehicles passed through the Dartford Tunnel or over the bridge. That's 117 every minute. It was the highest total ever and one day of a week in which 1,044,511 cars did the same. The west tunnel opened in 1963 and was followed by the aptly-named east tunnel in 1980. The bridge opened in 1991; since then one route has always been open. Quick tip: try to avoid the one Sunday a month when the bridge is closed for maintenance work. The whole traffic operation is administered by security guards in a fleet of Land Rovers that rack up over 100,000 miles a year on the same seven-mile round trip. Apparently the cars manage three years of this purgatory before they're shot and replaced. And sales reps thought they did monotonous mileage. It never stops...



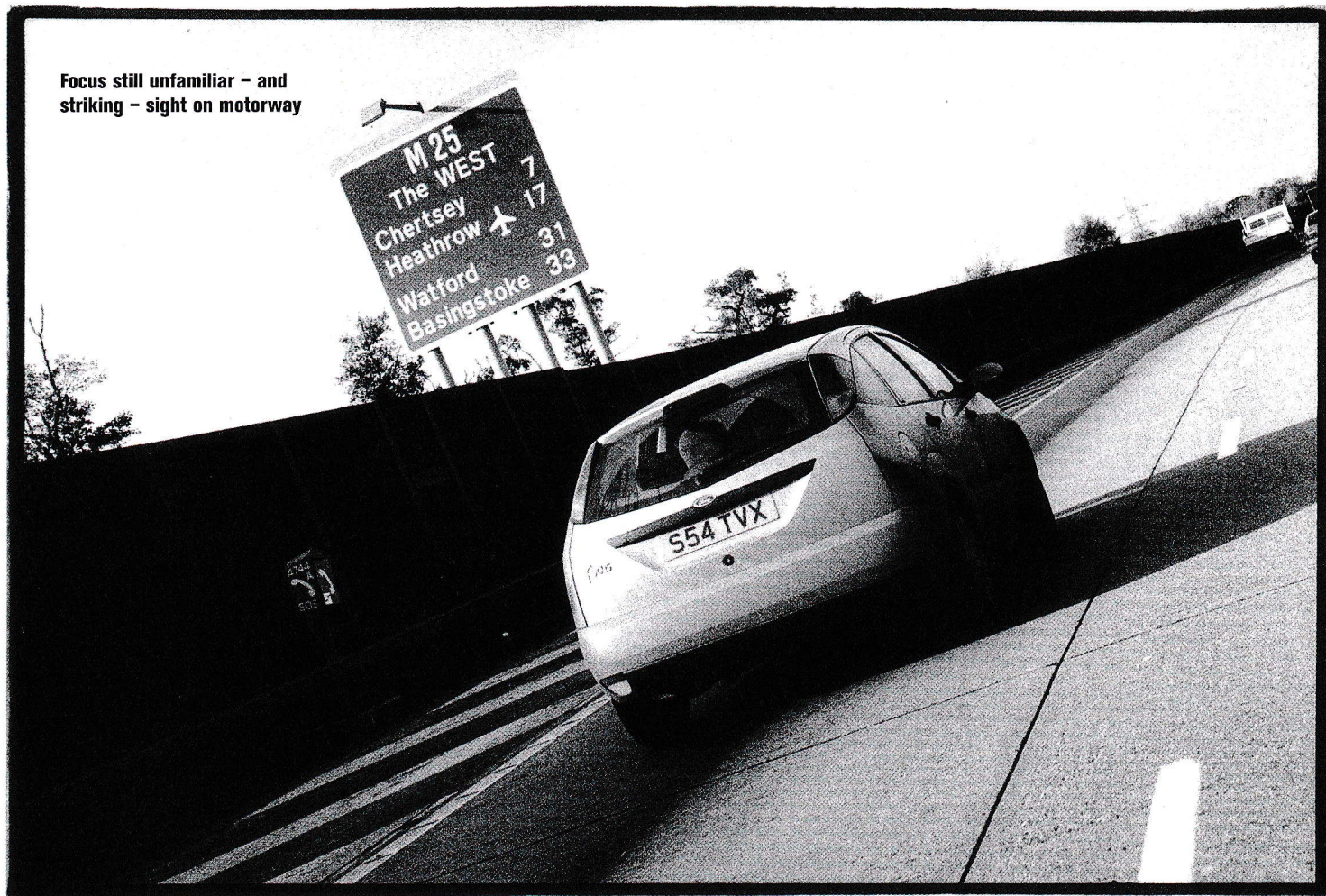
Deserted Dartford toll lanes a very rare sight

You get out of fifth every hour and a half"

Focus didn't miss a beat throughout its gruelling 10-day marathon



Focus still unfamiliar – and striking – sight on motorway



“The handbook says no running in, but it’s

◆ retaining wall. Police on the scene, driver upright and gesticulating “I’ve no idea how”

And then the sky turns evil black. It lets go with a sudden, brutal blast like a hotel shower. Big, tactile heater controls allow me to instantly adjust airflow for defog. Likewise, a quick flick of my middle finger has the wipers going. The Focus is unfamiliar but I can get to the important switches in seconds without thinking about it.

Hours to go, but I don’t mind. Feel-good buttons with silicon pads, rotary controls with rubberised surfaces, precise control action and, I think, a facia that looks better and better. I could comfortably spend another six hours in the Focus, no problem.

But I’ll bring a CD next time.

STEVE CROPLEY

When a trend-setting new car has been praised to the skies,

there’s always a chance it will disappoint when it begins the daily grind. Having seen this happen a few times before, I was ready for the marathon Focus to display some unheralded foibles – and so it did.

Since first hearing about the Focus a year ago, my preoccupation has been with its refinement. *Autocar* has already called it the smoothest and quietest car in its class. I’m a little disappointed, therefore, to

discover in the first half-minute of driving – as we accelerate up to the cruise – that the ride seems a little bony on the M25’s concrete sections in Surrey, that the engine is more audible above 5000rpm than I remember, and that there seems to be intrusive wind noise around the tops of the doors. Is this Focus different to the pre-production models I’ve been driving up to now?

Within minutes,

TEN ESSENTIAL M25 FACTS

- The first section of London’s orbital motorway was opened in September 1975. It wasn’t completed until October 1986.
- It cost £1 billion; at today’s prices it would be 10 times as much.
- Over 2.1 million trees were planted during construction.

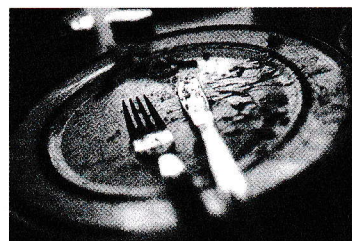


- Epping Foresters Cricket Club plays home games on top of the M25. The pitch was rebuilt on the roof of a tunnel.
- Over 200,000 cars use the busiest sections each day.
- There’s a song about the M25: Chris Rea’s *Road to Hell*.
- Every yard of the motorway is monitored by CCTV cameras.

- Eighty-four-year-old William Allen once spent two days circling the M25 looking for his daughter’s house.
- It measures 117.7 miles anti-clockwise and 117.5 miles clockwise.
- It’s the longest city bypass in the world.



Tempting to veer right for a change



Lots of grease essential for stamina





Feel stops roll around quickly when you're driving non-stop on the motorway; only three service centres on M25

the motorway traffic slows to a crawl while everyone contemplates a sad caravanner who has up-ended his holiday accommodation on the hard shoulder of the opposite lane. Once we've returned to 85mph, refinement issues are replaced by other thoughts.

By the time my head returns to the Focus's noise levels, things seem different. I'm admiring the quietness of the new 1.6-litre engine, pulling long-leggedly in the mid-3000s in fifth at a motorway cruise. The quietness of the tyres on most of the M25's many surfaces is impressive, and I've changed my mind about the wind noise, too. Sure, you can hear it, but once you stop listening it isn't intrusive at all. The ride, more firmly

sprung and damped than I remember, is dead quiet. The stiff bodyshell is practically boom-free over the joining strips that so efficiently excite others. All I discovered in those first seconds of driving, I conclude, was that the Focus isn't perfect.

I'm certain now that Ford has delivered on its claims. The Focus still seems a shade more taut and

sporty than I remembered, but it's certainly every bit as quiet and smooth.

THE VERDICT

It says in the Focus handbook that there are no running in rules, but in our experience it's well worth putting a quick 12,000 miles under the tyres.

Not only will the engine run smoother and quieter, it'll also deliver significantly greater performance and drink a staggering seven gallons of unleaded less per 1000 miles – a saving of about £250 over 12,000 miles.

It's not just economically that the Focus makes sense, of course. From our road tests we already knew it to be the best car in its class



Essex industry a familiar sight on approach to Dartford



BEFORE AND AFTER

FORD FOCUS 1.6

HOW FAST?

MPH	900 miles	12,900 miles
0-30	3.6sec	3.2sec
0-40	5.6	4.9
0-50	7.7	6.9
0-60	10.5	9.5
0-70	14.0	12.6
0-80	18.1	16.5
0-90	23.5	21.6
0-100	32.5	29.7
30-70	10.4	9.4

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

All engines get faster with miles. Our 1.6-litre Focus loosened up a lot on our M25 run, and after 11,770 miles was as quick as a low-mileage 1.8-litre model. In the first 1000 miles it averaged 36.2mpg, but improved to 42.1mpg over the last 1000 miles. Overall it averaged 36.3mpg.

dynamically. Now, after what amounts to a year spent behind the wheel on one of the world's toughest roads, we're certain it's a great car to live with as well.

On page seven of this issue there's a story announcing the Focus as the 1999 Car of the Year. One hundred laps of the M25 later, we can say that it's well deserved indeed. ●

worth racking up a quick 12,000 miles"



Well earned rest after a year's worth of motoring in the 1999 Car of the Year



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