

Family Face

by Joe Sage



Ford Escape pretty well founded the compact crossover segment (and the term) when it was launched in 2000. As such, its looks have tended to stand on their own, while Ford overall sought shifting uniformity, some models with a three-plate grille, some with a hexagonal approach, some such as Explorer dancing to their own beat. The most recent Escape had always seemed a bit brand-indistinct to us, so we looked forward to the 2017 model. Indeed, it comes through as a Ford all the way.

But enough about appearances. There is a lot going on under this skin.

Number one inside is the feature every Ford lover has been anticipating—now rolling out as quickly as it can across the lineup—the third iteration of Ford’s infotainment system, SYNC 3. In addition to resolving a great many issues users had with the first-gen SYNC and second-gen MyFord Touch systems, it delivers another feature every new vehicle buyer is clamoring for, and in both flavors—Apple CarPlay and Android Auto—along with Ford’s own suite of remote

connectivity features via FordPass and SYNC Connect, enabling you to lock, unlock and locate your Escape, schedule remote starts (nice on very hot or very cold days) and check fuel level.

Below the touchscreen are a redesigned center console with more storage space than the previous model and easier access to a lighted USB port and power outlet.

Driver assist technologies are also working their way through the lineup, bringing available adaptive cruise control, enhanced active park assist and lane-keeping features introduced in the Edge and Explorer over the last year or two. Using data from the lane-keeping system, driver alert can detect fatigued driving and warn you in the instrument cluster and via steering wheel vibration.

There are three trim levels available for the 2017 Escape—S, SE and Titanium. SYNC Connect is included on top-trim Titanium and available in a Technology Package on the SE. There is also a new Sport Appearance Package available for SE or Titanium, with Ebony Black painted 19-inch wheels, Ebony Black



The prior Escape’s front sheet metal didn’t coordinate styling with much else in the Ford lineup (maybe the current Transit Connect, a bit), but did have a lot of commonality with the prior generation Hyundai Tucson (Tucson/Escape above left). The new Escape bears a lot of resemblance to the new Hyundai Tucson (Tucson/Escape above right; the Tucson came first both times), but this time it also resembles the Ford family.

high-gloss painted upper grille and side vents, Piano Black high-gloss fog lamp bezels, Absolute Black painted mirror caps, and dark headlamp and taillight trim.

We’ve known to expect great things from even Ford’s smallest EcoBoost engines since we first got behind the wheel of a Fiesta with 1.0L three-cylinder EcoBoost on the track at Dearborn a few years ago—wow. And the 2.3L four-cylinder EcoBoost in the new Mustang, tuned to 300 hp, makes for a seriously tough decision against the V8 GT.

The 179 horses living in the Escape’s four-cylinder 1.5L EcoBoost are impressive, as well, or for 245 horses, there’s a twin-scroll turbo 2.0L EcoBoost four.

Base (S) trim comes with a 2.5L naturally aspirated engine, bigger, less powerful and thirstier. Unless shaving every dime at purchase time, count us in for the SE or Titanium, with either of the EcoBoosts—and we’ll earn back the difference in MPG and grins.

Auto start/stop systems are becoming standard on many vehicles now, one more means to achieve CAFE fuel standards and to clear the air—the vehicle shuts down while idling and restarts when the light turns green. Early systems from some makers were a bit rough, and some still are, but Ford is especially proud of the new system incorporated in the 2017 Escape, which they point out is the first implementation in a high-volume vehicle. Standard with either of the EcoBoost engines, the auto start/stop system claims a restart time under half a second—still a little slow in the more aggressive parts of metro Phoenix, but you can learn to feather the pedal and beat the lag. Either way, the new Escape’s auto restart is very smooth, and that’s most welcome.

Despite the difference in cost between our two launch drive samples (see sidebar), the pricier one not only had 4WD, but was Titanium grade. Our front-driver SE represents the middle grade, which has accounted for 60 percent of 2016 sales (entry-level S 14 and Titanium 26). Escape starts at \$23,600 for an S trim with the old 2.5L engine and front-wheel

drive (only). Volume seller SE starts at \$25,100 with the 1.5L EcoBoost. Going for the 2.0L will cost you \$1295 and set you back just 1 MPG in fuel mileage. Four-wheel drive adds \$1750, and we’d go for that. The 2.0L EcoBoost can tow 3500 pounds to the 1.5L’s 2000 (or the base model’s 1500). You know what you tow, and for some people, either will be fine. To us, the whole nature of a utility vehicle is to expect (or invite) the unexpected, so we’d equip ourselves with the tow capacity and near-match MPG of the 2.0L EcoBoost, then decide between SE and Titanium trim levels and options.

Ford Escape has been dominant in this segment for a long time, and the new model shows they intend to stay that way. ■

DRIVEN: SE FWD 1.5L

ENGINE	.....1.5L EcoBoost inline-4
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd auto w/paddles
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	.....179 hp / 177 lb-ft
WEIGHT	.....3526 lb
TOWING	.....2000 lb
MPG	.....23/30/26 city/hwy/comb

BASE PRICE\$25,100

OPTIONS (NOT ITEMIZED): SYNC 3 with SYNC connect, reverse sensing, roof rack and side rails, blind spot info, halogen projector w/ LED signature lighting, 9-speaker audio, one-touch up/down, 110V outlet, power liftgate, panoramic vista roof.

TOTAL as tested\$29,380

DRIVEN: TITANIUM 4WD 2.0L

ENGINE	.....2.0L twin-scroll EcoBoost inline-4
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd auto w/paddles
DRIVETRAIN	.....4WD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	.....245 hp / 275 lb-ft
WEIGHT	.....3765 lb
TOWING	.....3500 lb
MPG	.....22/29/25 city/hwy/comb

BASE PRICE\$32,145

OPTIONS (NOT ITEMIZED): Enhanced active park assist, auto high beams, heated steering wheel, lane-keep, rain-sensing wipers, adaptive cruise, navigation, panoramic vista roof.

TOTAL as tested\$38,315

