

First drive

Is the Mazda3 the new leader of the hatch pack?

Mazda's makeover

MAZDA3

The original Mazda3 was a Best Buy that scored highly for reliability and owner satisfaction. However, its unremarkable styling meant that it passed under the radar of many car buyers. The bolder, second-generation 3 should change that.

With a sharp design, plus new diesel engines and standard-fit electronic stability control (ESC), the new 3 is a serious threat to mainstream rivals such as the Ford Focus. Mazda has improved claimed fuel economy and reduced CO2 emissions across the range, while the 2.0 Sport petrol has a fuel-saving stop/start system that will become an option on all petrol models later this year.

On the road, the Mazda offers a well balanced and sporty drive. There's minimal body-roll in corners and the steering is very responsive.



The Mazda3 is based on the same platform as the current Focus, but is significantly cheaper than its Ford rival. The 3 range starts at £13,500 for the 1.6 S petrol – that's almost £3,000 less than the base-spec Focus 1.6 petrol. The difference is much smaller for the diesel-powered 3, at around £300.

Mk6 Golf GTI: a faster, greener and more refined hot hatch

Deutsch marque

VW GOLF GTI

Thirty-three years after the first Golf GTI, Volkswagen has revved up and remixed the ingredients of its iconic hot hatch to serve up the new Mk6. The 2.0-litre petrol engine from the outgoing Mk5 model has been modified to produce an extra 10bhp, bringing peak power to 207bhp and cutting the GTI's 0-62mph time to 6.9 seconds.

Despite the increase in performance, claimed fuel economy rises from 35.3mpg to 38.7mpg, while CO2 emissions fall from 189g/km to 170g/km.


An electronically controlled differential called XDS offers improved traction and makes the Golf feel glued to the road.

VW has made the GTI's cabin so quiet that it's had to add a sound generator in the exhaust to produce the requisite sporty engine note. At motorway speeds it has the refinement of a luxury car, but find a winding country road and the GTI is every bit as thrilling as its predecessor.

VERDICT The Golf costs £1,500 more than the outgoing model, with prices from £22,410 for the three-door manual. It's not cheap, but the Mk6 GTI is a superb all-rounder with a peerless image that is sure to keep resale values up. The best hot hatch just got better.



This month

For our latest First Drive reviews, visit www.which.co.uk/cars throughout the month. You can view video test drives  for important debuts from Citroën and Toyota, and read our first impressions of many new models.



New Toyotas

Toyota launches two new cars this month – the Urban Cruiser and the new Verso. Read our verdicts for both new Toyotas and watch a video test drive of the Urban Cruiser at www.which.co.uk/cars.



Volkswagen Polo

It isn't due on sale until October, but you can read our first drive report on the new VW Polo online now. The fifth-generation Polo is longer and wider than the Mk4, but it's also around 7.5% lighter. VW promises a five-star Euro NCAP standard stability control score, plus a range of super-economical Bluetmotion models. Log on to www.which.co.uk/cars for more.

Holiday reading

The Summer issue of *Which? Car* magazine is on sale in Sainsbury's from 1 May. It's packed with reviews, features, product tests, a used car guide and a motoring advice section. That's 250 pages of info – and no ads! If you're buying a car, you can't afford not to read it.

