

September 2022 edition

In Gear

6 APPEAL



KIA'S UBER-COOL EV



PLUGGING THE GAP

MAZDA'S HI-TECH PHEV TAKES AIM AT PREMIUM SUV RIVALS

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CHARGING:

Opt for the CX-60 and you get a choice of two charging cables – a regular three-pin plug and a Type 2 connector – proving Mazda has given its first PHEV some thought. When using the latter, owners can expect the battery to be replenished in two hours and 20 minutes when hooked up to a 7kW wallbox. In pure EV mode at speeds under 62mph, you can expect a range of almost 40 miles..



PRACTICALITY:

At 570-litres, the cargo area in the CX-60 is competitive for this class and should be able to handle most day-to-day needs, although a lack of hooks inevitably means items end up moving about. With the individually folding rear seats out of the way this rises to a smidge over 1,700-litres. Interior storage is so-so and includes a phone tray and compartment under the centre armrest.



DRIVING:

The 8-speed automatic is by far the most polished aspect of the CX-60's transmission as it slurs gears and reacts quickly when you pull on the flappy paddles behind the steering wheel. Performance when the petrol engine and electric motor join forces for a car of this size and mass is nothing short of impressive and the four-wheel-drive set-up puts this power down with ease.



FIRST DRIVE: MAZDA CX-60 PHEV AWD TAKUMI



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£52,050 (as tested)

Engine:
2.5-litre, 4cyl petrol PHEV

Power/torque:
323bhp/369lb ft

Transmission:
8-speed automatic, four-wheel-drive

0-62mph:
5.8 seconds

Top speed:
124mph

Economy/CO2:
188mpg/33g/Km

Mazda is embarking on a mission to move things up a level – and the CX-60 is said to herald the start of this. Never one to shy away from a fresh challenge, those working at the Japanese company feel the time is now right to take aim at premium brands in the medium-sized Sport Utility Vehicle arena.

By Jason Craig

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BIG CAR, BIG EXPECTATIONS

Every new nameplate adds potential to a car maker's line-up and the CX-60 – Mazda's first to adopt plug-in hybrid technology – is no different. With supply of the five-seater "protected" by the on-going semi-conductor shortage, it will push total sales of electrified vehicles wearing the wing-shaped badge to 70% by the end of this year. By contrast, back in 2012, Mazda's 'e-sales' weighed in at a mere 2%. The PHEV system isn't anything new or fanciful as similar set-ups have been in service for some time now and in the CX-60 an EV range of 39-miles at speeds below 62mph is promised as is combined fuel economy verging on 190mpg. Another statistic that is sure to make this the most compelling in a range that will expand with the introduction of a 3.3-litre e-Skyactiv D turbo diesel and a 3-litre e-Skyactiv X petrol that both incorporate 48-volt mild hybridisation, is the super tax-friendly 33g/km CO2 rating.

THREE MODEL RANGE

UK buyers have just three trim choices comprising 'Exclusive-Line' (£43,950), 'Homura' (£46,645), and 'Takumi' (£48,050) as reviewed here. Another first for Mazda is the optional full-length panoramic sunroof, albeit on mid-range-topping CX-60s at a cost of £1,000. Standard equipment on all examples is impressive to say the least, and includes a 12.3-inch driver display and an identical-sized multimedia system. The former has minimal tailorability and the latter relies on sat-nav software rivals' easily trump. These are joined by heated front seats, a heated steering wheel, dual-zone climate control and a raft of safety aids from Blind Spot Monitoring to Smart Brake Support to Lane Keep Assist. By throwing the creature comforts sink at the CX-60 "elevates Mazda to new heights", journalists who were present for the car's UK launch in Liverpool were told. For the time being, regardless of trim, the same 188bhp Skyactiv-G 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol and 173bhp e-motor is what powers the SUV.

IT'S BOLD BUT IS IT BEAUTIFUL?

We are unsure if the CX-60 is going to win universal praise for the way that it looks, considering there are better styled SUVs on the market right now. From this writer's perspective, the rear is more of a success story than the front where clear cues link it to the slightly smaller CX-5 are to be found. With the engine being

longitudinally-mounted, this has given rise to a snooty nose – a quality particularly evident side-on – and while designers persist with the minimalist approach to surface detailing, perhaps some would not go amiss here. It isn't all bad, though: pulsing front indicators that are neatly integrated into the front chrome grille surround, and faux exhausts that sit within the base of the back bumper, are points in case. Alloy wheels measuring between 18- and 20-inches are offered, with dark wheel arch mouldings on 'Exclusive-Line' models swapped for colour-coded trim pieces on 'Homura' and 'Takumi'. There is a choice of eight body shade and all except 'Arctic White' command a premium.

RAISING THE BAR ON THE INSIDE

Considering the advances that have been made with interior packaging and technology of late, Mazda has had to raise its already strong A-game another level when joining the premium SUV sector. And the good news is the CX-60's cabin doesn't disappoint. Considering the degree of convenience features on show, the asking price represents pretty decent value for money on the round. Quality is another particularly strong aspect, with flagship 'Takumi' blending maple wood panels, soft nappa leather, bright chrome detailing and sofa-like cloth for the middle portion of the dashboard. That adds to the sense of craftsmanship for those travelling in the front or in the back where space is good for a group of four adults – but no more than that. It is a real squeeze for three adults perched across the middle bench in comparison to the Ford Kuga or Audi Q5, it has to be said. Shoulder and leg room are limited. Climbing in and out of the back is a bit of a faff, too, so this is another

blot in the CX-60's copybook.

COMFORTABLE BUT NOT ALWAYS QUIET

An area Mazda is renowned for excelling in driveability – and that long held tradition continues here. The key controls – from the steering wheel, to the pedals, to the stubby gear lever – are perfectly positioned and nicely weighted. Getting into position is a breeze, too, as the drivers' seat offers tilt, slide and lumbar adjustment. On the move, the ride is smooth at cruising speeds but it has a tendency to become brittle – the trade-off for the extra mass introduced by the battery pack and wheels that are wrapped in low-profile Bridgestone rubber. This came to the fore over some of Liverpool's most unforgiving streets and along tatty country roads in the very heart of north Wales'. Rattles and squeaks did not develop, however, and thumps and bangs were well suppressed. The petrol-electric set-up proved to be a bit of a mixed bag. Under revs the engine turns coarse and the whine from the electric propulsion system is all too apparent.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Cabin has premium feel
 - ✓ Technology is Mazda's best
 - ✓ Smart handling for a SUV
-
- ✗ Looks will divide opinion
 - ✗ Rear space is cramped
 - ✗ E-motor isn't the quietest



INTERIOR: Not only is the CX-60's dash area and centre console minimalist, they are also premium in look and feel. The elongated multimedia screen – which is operated via Mazda's now familiar rotary dial – is blessed with reasonably sharp graphics but the sat-nav proved less than decisive during our long drive. Physical shortcut buttons for both the car's heating and ventilation remain.

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CHARGING:

The EV6 has a WLTP range of almost 330-miles and if driven sensibly guarantees pretty predictable range from a full charge of its battery. One big selling point of this car is that it gets ultra-fast charging capability, so linked up to a 350kW charger means you go from 10% to 80% in under 20 minutes – or 73 minutes if using a 50kW charger. The port is concealed at the rear on the driver's side



DRIVING:

There is a tendency to think EVs are, by their very nature, uninspiring to be in and not very exciting to drive – but the EV6 dispels that myth thanks to a multi-link rear suspension, a taut body that sits low to the road and resists roll, and a pointy front end. All round ride quality is excellent – even on huge 19-inch wheels – and little, if anything, unsettles the crossover. It is a great drivers' car.



STYLING:

You cannot get away from the fact the EV6 is a big car – but Kia's designers have disguised that by delivering a body shape that is svelte and swoopy. Entry-level 'Air' models blend piano black plastic on the mirror caps, wheel arch surrounds and roof spoiler with a choice of six body colours. One standout feature is the rear LED lightbar that spans the entire width of the curvaceous back end.



FIRST DRIVE: KIA EV6 AIR



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£44,195 (as tested)

Battery/motor:
77.4kWh/AC
electric motor

Power/torque:
226bhp/258lb ft

Transmission:
Single-speed
automatic,
rear-wheel-drive

0-62mph:
7.2 seconds

Top speed:
114mph

Range:
328 miles

In motoring circles electrification is the buzzword at the moment. Everyone it seems is talking about it – and that narrative is being driven by companies like Kia. In a very short space of time, it has gone from building no battery-powered models to offering five. And the latest is this all-new EV6 flagship.

By Jason Craig

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THE EV6 IN 60 SECONDS

In short, this is Kia's first bespoke electric vehicle and one that maxes the South Korean manufacturer's technological arsenal. Sold in three flavours – 'Air', 'GT-Line' and 'GT-Line S' – the EV6 also comes with a choice of two powertrains: a 226bhp single motor that powers the rear wheels and a dual motor set-up that sends 321bhp to all four corners. Within the last few weeks, the line-up has been expanded to include the performance-focussed 'GT' which packs 577bhp and a 162mph top speed. Not that you would think it but the EV6 – a svelte and swoopy crossover that puts aerodynamic efficiency at the heart of its styling – can trace some of its roots back to the Soul EV crossover. That small family car broke new ground for Kia back in 2015 and the EV6 has been tasked with the next step in a journey that will see no fewer than eleven all-new battery electric vehicles launched over the next four years.

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

We mean this in a good way, of course, because from every angle the EV6 has a tendency to throw up something new to catch your eye, or get you talking. On first glance it seems a pretty straightforward piece of design – a low-set bonnet that rushes up to meet the swept-back windscreen, blistered wheel arches to accommodate either 19- or 20-inch alloy wheels, and a pointy-edged roof-mounted wing. Look again and you will notice the flush-fitting pop-out door handles, concave-sculpted wing mirror caps, and a subtle lip on the boot lid that acts a secondary spoiler. In fact, to ensure the EV6 can move through the air in the most efficient manner possible, the underside is entirely flat. The other upside of this is an eerily quiet cabin that is devoid of wind noise and for the most part tyre roar. Other design highlights include aggressively profiled LED headlights, a ribbed effect for the wheel arch surrounds, a double band chrome belt that kicks up to meet the rear doors, and exposed 3D-effect LED tail-lamps.

A GAME-CHANGING INTERIOR

Aside from some questionable choice of plastics for the door grabs, the interior in the EV6 is on a par with rival premium EV crossovers – either from this class, or indeed a class above. Flashes of silver and piano black trim combine with a triangular patterned finish for the material covering the top half of the dash and clever

mood lighting to create a special ambience. Much of what goes on from behind the wheel is controlled via twin 12.3-inch colour displays. The one nearest the passenger controls the satellite navigation, EV functions and multimedia choices, and the driver's screen relays real-time energy consumption and brake regeneration. Another aspect difficult to ignore is the airy feeling. Key to this is a free-standing lower console that incorporates the stop/start button, gear selector dial and park assist. It has been raised to create a through area between the driver and passenger, and beneath it sits a large compartment for storing a tablet device, keys coins, or books. Overall, it is hard to fault.

FANCY AND ALSO FUNCTIONAL

We have already made reference to how airy the EV6 feels on the inside – but it's worth revisiting it. Because each of the 384 cells that are packaged within the 77.4kWh lithium-ion battery are located in the car's floor, the footwells are totally flat and the central hump often present in other cars absent. Knee and headroom are also both excellent and there are limousine levels of comfort for two adults riding side-by-side in the second row. The ski-hatch concealed by the drop-down arm rest in the centre of the split-folding 60/40 rear seats, USB charge ports on the outer shoulder of the front seat backs, and aeroplane style map pockets are all further practical touches. Given just how long the EV6 is, it is hardly surprising boot space is so generous – if not remarkable – at 490-litres. A height-adjustable boot floor ensures a flush loading surface

and when positioned in its highest setting, the area directly underneath it can still be used to stow items. Also worth pointing out is how the charge cables are stored. In most EVs, these are found in the boot but in the EV6 there is a small 'frunk' under the bonnet that can swallow a Type 2 cable and a home charge lead.

FAST AND FUN TO DRIVE

By their very nature, electric cars are pretty nippy and although a quoted power figure of 244bhp does not sound like much, you can still arrive at 62mph in 6.9 seconds in the EV6. The more powerful all-wheel-drive version shaves 1.9 seconds off that with the trade-off being 15-miles less range. Still, if you select 'Sport' via the button on the steering wheel this has you adequately covered for overtakes or instant hits of acceleration. One pedal braking is possible by choosing from one of four levels of regenerative braking via flappy paddles.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Impressive EV range
- ✓ Styling is space-age
- ✓ Generous kit, sporty drive

- ✗ Some materials are suspect
- ✗ Boot is smaller than rivals'
- ✗ Rear visibility isn't great



INTERIOR: Black vegan leather upholstery, a heated steering wheel and heated front seats, two 12.3-inch screens for multimedia and driver-based functions, and a reversing camera are standard on 'Air' spec cars as is ambient lighting, rear parking sensors, four USB charge ports, and four 12-volt sockets. As the cabin is wide it is not too much of a squeeze in row two for three adults sitting side-by-side.



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MULTIMEDIA:

The star of the F-Pace's cabin is the super slick and quick-to-respond 'Pivo Pro' touchscreen. The homepage is split into three sections – navigation, media and phone settings – and being roughly the size of an average handheld tablet means inputs are relatively easy on the move. Some physical buttons would be a help as the screen attracts finger prints all too easily.



DRIVING:

One aspect that didn't need tinkering as part of this mid-cycle refresh was the way the F-Pace points and steers. Using double wishbones at the front and a multi-link rear axle – a set-up shared with its XE and XF saloon siblings as they all share the same iQ-AL platform – guarantees engaging handling and ensures it is as sporty to drive as it looks. Few rivals run the Jaguar close.



PRACTICALITY:

As a premium family SUV the F-Pace is not the roomiest on the inside but neither is it disgraced by the competition as space in the front is brilliant and there is plenty of leg and knee room for those in the back. The full-length panoramic glass sunroof is a really nice feature but it does come at the expense of head space which six-foot-plus passengers are sure to notice.



FIRST DRIVE: JAGUAR F-PACE D200 R-DYNAMIC SE



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£52,940 (as tested)

Engine:
2-litre,
4cyl turbo diesel
MHEV

Power/torque:
201bhp/317lb ft

Transmission:
8-speed automatic,
four-wheel-drive

0-62mph:
7.6 seconds

Top speed:
130mph

Economy/CO2:
45mpg/165g/Km

The F-Pace is the largest car in Jaguar's portfolio and one widely renowned for being blessed with class-leading dynamics and sharp looks. This facelifted version of the load lugger promises much of the same, albeit with an interior that is more inviting – and tech packed – than ever before.

By Jason Craig

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THE F-PACE: WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

If you are in the market for a slickly styled premium SUV then the F-Pace deserves a spot on your shortlist. The changes worth pointing out comprise super slim headlights that incorporate two-piece J-blade DRLs and LEDs – or optional Pixel LEDs – a reprofiled bonnet with power bulge, and a larger grille. The rear hasn't gone untouched as here the tail-lights are, again, slimmer and also inherit the chicane arrangement first seen on the all-electric I-Pace crossover. Also new is the tail-gate and rear bumper. If the car doesn't look intimidating enough in regular guise, then Jaguar has that sorted: opting for the 'Black Exterior Pack' (£650) dechromes the body and introduces smoked trim pieces and finishers.

A RUN THROUGH THE MODELS

The F-Pace is built in three regular guises before 'Black', 'Sport' and the 178mph 'SVR' models are taken into consideration. Tested here is mid-spec 'SE'. Less money gets you into 'S' and for a few thousand pounds more 'HSE'. However, we think our choice it strikes a decent balance between price and equipment before options are added. So, 20-inch 10-spoke gloss black wheels – a nice match especially if opting for the black visual pack – a powered tail-gate and R-Dynamic badges on the grille and boot lid feature. If cash reserves allow, these can be joined by privacy glass (£415) for added security, a fixed panoramic glass sunroof (£1,275) that bathes the cabin in natural light, and deep 'Firenze Red' metallic paint (£740) that pops in the summer sun. In comparison, the interior of this car has been a chink in its armour – but Jaguar insists it has listened and learned.

A PREMIUM FEELING CABIN

Before the facelifted F-Pace arrived, there was little to get excited about on the inside as overall quality was on a level that struggled to worry Germany's finest. Also lagging was the technology, dated and lacklustre, the car was quickly left behind. This update has improved things massively, however, and allows the F-Pace to turn the tables on Mercedes, Audi and BMW. Plush materials and intricate detailing are welcome, but the real show-stopper is the reconfigured centre console that is now home to a curved 11.4-inch touchscreen. Incorporating JLR's latest 'Pivo Pro' software, the display is positioned at a sensible height which helps when operating it

on the move. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatible, the unit is blessed with HD graphics, fast processing times and endless options. An interactive driver display common to other Jaguars can be tailored to show different information, although the touch-sensitive steering wheel buttons prove fiddly. As before, contrast stitching and leather upholstered seats are standard, with wireless smartphone charging (£300) an option for the first time alongside a great sounding Meridian stereo (£840).

IS THERE SPACE FOR FIVE INSIDE?

Because the F-Pace is not the biggest medium-sized SUV it is ideally suited for two adults up top and three kids in the back – or two adults in rows one and two. Room on all fronts is sure to keep everyone happy on longer jaunts and while Jaguar does not offer a 7-seat option, the boot is still a useful size and either matches – or better – the competition. With the middle chairs in use, it measures 650-litres extending to 1,740-litres when these are folded flat. Tie-down points and nets secure precious cargo in place both quickly and easily and the 40/20/40 split-folding arrangement allows for longer items like a pair of skis to be slid straight down the middle.

A PEAK UNDER THE BONNET

The projected big-sellers are the diesel engines – two 4-cylinder 2-litre units tuned to 161bhp and 201bhp respectively, and a meatier 3-litre 6-cylinder. Now with the added benefit of mild-hybrid assistance, the mid-range motor is

hushed, linear and not short on pulling power even with its own weight, four grown adults and a boot load of bags to haul about. Utilising a belt-integrated starter generator harvests energy under braking to later assist acceleration. Considering real-world performance, you can still expect to achieve up to 45mpg even in four-wheel-drive guise. Developed by ZF, the 8-speed automatic gearbox is the icing on the cake; cog swaps are slick moving up or down the 'box and there is not the jerkiness that afflicts some rivals' when you come to stop-start driving in tail-backs or bumbling around town. Ride and handling-wise, the F-Pace is hard to fault and is the only choice for those who appreciate deft body control, sharp steering and a constant stream of reassuring grip. None of this comes at the expense of everyday comfort, although the largest wheel sizes lessen the dampers' effectiveness somewhat.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Wins in the looks department
- ✓ Cabin is a massive improvement
- ✓ Fun to drive and economical

- ✗ Some rivals are roomier
- ✗ Larger wheels hurt the ride
- ✗ Poor tail-pipe emissions



INTERIOR: Most of the in-car functions are controlled via the touchscreen, although there is a small panel directly beneath it with two knurled dials – one for the driver, and one for the front seat passenger – that operate heating and ventilation. The centre console is also pretty minimalist with the biggest change seeing the old rotary gear selector make way for a stubby 'palm shifter'.



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MULTIMEDIA:

Measuring 9-inches in 'Motion' trim and 11-inches in 'Ultra' spec, the software on this new system brings it closer to class rivals than before. Those not keen on it do have the ability to bypass it as Android Auto and Apple CarPlay are standard. While the graphics are sharp and the screen is set at a nice height, pressing icons multiple times before anything happens was all too common an occurrence for us.



DRIVING:

Respectably fast, efficient and calm at motorway speeds, Suzuki's 1.4-litre petrol motor is a good all-rounder while the automatic transmission shifts quickly and is not easily fooled. As the suspension is softly sprung, pitch and lean is one drawback but driven sensibly, and with controlled inputs through the fairly neutral-feeling steering, this can be prevented.



PRACTICALITY:

Prospective buyers won't be left short-changed when it comes to total space in the front and the back, finding places to store everyday items, or charging electronic devices on the move. Access to the boot requires you to lift a sizeable – and weighty – tail-gate but once out of the way a moveable boot floor, anchor points, bag hook and deep cubby holes on either side reveal themselves.



FIRST DRIVE: SUZUKI S-CROSS ULTRA ALLGRIP



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£31,699 (as tested)

Engine:
1.4-litre, 4cyl turbo petrol MHEV

Power/torque:
127bhp/173lb ft

Transmission:
6-speed automatic, four-wheel-drive

0-62mph:
10.2 seconds

Top speed:
121mph

Economy/CO2:
46.3mpg/139g/Km

Most crossovers are a misrepresentation. Why? Because they don't offer four-wheel-drive even though they draw half of their inspiration from off-roaders. Not so the S-Cross from Suzuki. Entirely new for 2022, this two-model Japanese car is also unique because it is sold exclusively as a hybrid.

By Jason Craig

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WHAT'S NEW FOR 2022?

The previous S-Cross was pretty much a non-starter in the styling stakes compared to the likes of the Nissan Qashqai, Skoda Kamiq and Ford Puma. With that criticism ringing in their ears, those working in Suzuki's design department were set the task of creating a "powerful and bold" look. From certain stances it has some Dacia DNA, with this especially true of the angled LED headlamps. A big grille dominated by the Suzuki badge also features chrome inserts while lower down there is the customary fake skid plate and plastic cladding for the bumper's outer edges and wheel arches. At the rear, tail-lights reminiscent of those on the Peugeot 2008 are joined by a black bar and a general profile not too dissimilar to the out-going Kia Niro. As for choice, the S-Cross is sold in 'Motion' which starts at £24,999 and rises to over £30,000 for 'Ultra' spec if an automatic transmission is requested.

MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

Suzuki prides itself on offering feature-packed cars at affordable prices and that applies to the S-Cross. Alloy wheels, aluminium roof rails, rear privacy glass, front and rear parking sensors, a rear parking camera, heated front seats and keyless start/stop are all standard as is a 7-inch colour touchscreen that grows to 9-inches on 'Ultra' versions. You can also expect satellite navigation on these models along with seats and door trim that are finished in a synthetic leather. As for cabin layout, it is going to be familiar to existing S-Cross owners as the vast majority of the knobs, buttons and switches have been carried over wholesale. There are some squidgy surfaces but most plastics – even those at eye level – are hard. What is different is the multimedia system; mounted as if floating – and framed in silver – the software and graphics are a huge leap forward on before. That said, we did experience occasional freezing and frustratingly slow response times to inputs.

THE SPACE RACE

S-Cross buyers are promised an interior "packed with a variety of appealing features for five adults with ample luggage space too". At 4.3 metres long it equals the Peugeot 2008 which, itself, is not the most accommodating family car on the market. Like most options in this class, five adults and their bags will be able to squeeze into the S-Cross but it is better suited

for two across the rear bench as they get individually reclining seat backs as well as ample foot space, leg and shoulder room. Head room for taller passengers – especially with the full-length panoramic sunroof – is a tad neat. As for the height adjustable cargo area that totals a reasonable 430-litres, the load lip is positioned at a nice height and that makes it easy to load or unload items. In addition, you will find two anchor points and a 12-volt socket – ideal for powering a handheld vacuum cleaner to clean up any hair traces your furry friend might have left on your days out together.

A LOOK UNDER THE BONNET

Mild hybrid assistance is at play in both S-Cross models in the guise of a 48-volt battery that recovers energy under braking before deploying this as you step on the gas. You don't have the ability to adjust the regenerative braking levels as some rivals do, though drivers are going to feel it at work as they ease off the accelerator pedal. The 1.4-litre, four cylinder 'BoosterJet' petrol can be paired to either a six-speed manual or a six-speed automatic; we sampled the latter and were impressed at how smooth and decisive it was over a week's worth of motoring. A power output of 127bhp equals adequate performance and amounts to a 0-62mph time of 9.5 seconds in front-wheel-drive guise and 10.2 seconds if Suzuki's 'All Grip' four-wheel-drive system is chosen. Refinement is very good as the motor is hushed engine, and a good helping of sound deadening materials in and around the footwells cuts down on tyre and wind noise.

SURE-FOOTED ON THE ROAD

Crossovers are not built to stir the senses behind the wheel – and the latest S-Cross is no different in this respect. However, what you will find pretty quickly is a nicely damped family car that competently deals with all of the usual challenges and bug bears motorists have to contend with on a daily basis out on the open road. The components underpinning the S-Cross have been thoroughly reworked says Suzuki and on this evidence, it is hard to disagree due to the way it handles – a marked improvement on its predecessor. AllGrip – a system that continuously shuffles torque between the front and rear wheels when slip is detected – has a hand in this. Programmed for normal, sport or snow driving, and operated via a small rotary dial on the lower console, it guarantees steadfast traction. One other neat feature is the 'lock' function. Press this button and on mud or sandy surfaces the limited slip differential brakes any slipping wheels and transfers torque to those that have purchase.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Smooth and quiet engine
- ✓ High equipment count
- ✓ Good value for money

- ✗ Cabin plastics disappoint
- ✗ Rivals are roomier
- ✗ Ultra spec is only 4WD



INTERIOR: On the inside, the old S-Cross and the new model are a mirror image as Suzuki has lifted over lots of parts – from the steering wheel to the air conditioning controls – unchanged. Even the door panels and glovebox are reused. The driver binnacle is nicely presented making it clear to decipher on the move and marries a 4.2-inch LCD information display with two large silver ringed dials for speed and revs.

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ENGINE:

The hybrid set-up found under the bonnet of the Jazz is carried across to the HR-V and is largely identical, save for more power from the four-cylinder petrol motor and a larger battery that guarantees a mile's worth of EV driving at town speeds. Of all the self-charging systems currently on the market, the one bearing Honda's name arguably ranks as the most polished and efficient.



PRACTICALITY:

This is one area that really lets the side down. Room for the driver and front seat passenger cannot be faulted but it is a different story for those travelling in the back, taller people especially. Head room is stingy at best and the shape and height of the rear bench's middle section is unforgivable. Boot space is also average, although the cinema-style rear seats are a big bonus.



STYLING:

Our 'Advance Style' HR-V got a whole host of styling enhancements, including a two-tone roof, contrast door mirror caps, and silver-effect roof rails. Customers can choose from a trio of design packs, two optional 18-inch wheel profiles, and one of five body colours. If you settle for the 'Premium Sunlight White Pearl' shade then be prepared to pay an extra £850 for the privilege.



FIRST DRIVE: HONDA HR-V ADVANCE STYLE



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£34,850 (as tested)

Engine:
1.5-litre petrol plus two e-motors

Power/torque:
129bhp/187lb ft

Transmission:
e-CVT,
front-wheel drive

0-62mph:
10.7 seconds

Top speed:
106mph

Economy/CO2:
52.3mpg/122g/Km

Have you ever wondered what the three letters HR-V stand for? Well, wonder no more because they are an acronym for 'High-rider Revolutionary Vehicle'. Based on previous attempts, perhaps Honda's been guilty of over-hyping revolutionary, so is it more of the same with this all-new version?

By Jason Craig

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A CASE OF THIRD TIME LUCKY?

The Honda HR-V is a vehicle that feels as though it has been around a lot longer than it has but, in actual fact, this is only the third-generation of this medium-sized SUV and on initial viewing it does create a favourable impression. There is a choice of three models – 'Elegance', 'Advance' and the range-topping 'Advance Plus' we are testing here – with prices starting at £29,410 and rising to a snip under £35,000. Overall, the styling has more than a hint of Mazda about it, especially the side profile and the headlamps' silhouette, although that is no bad thing. Around the back, the window swoops down aggressively to meet a cool-looking, full-width LED light bar. All HR-Vs sit on 18-inch wheels and have a chic body-coloured front grille instead of the traditional chrome finish worn by rivals. 'Advance Style' is further differentiated by silver roof rails, a black contrast roof and dark door mirror caps.

A PARED BACK INTERIOR

On the round, Honda's designers have done a great job of signing off on a dash that is smart, well-made and simple to figure out whether you are parked up or on the move. The 9-inch touchscreen is a big step forward compared to Honda systems of before and – thankfully – those assigned to bring this car to market have resisted the need for all functions to be operated through it. Therefore, you still have a row of traditional touch buttons and switches directly beneath it to control heating and ventilation. We are not as convinced by the part-digital driver display. Owners can change the inner section of the left dial to show various pieces of real-time information, whereas the speedo is old-school analogue. Standard kit is comprehensive and includes a reversing camera, LED headlights and auto sensing wipers. Dual-zone climate control, an auto-dimming rear view mirror, a heated steering wheel and automated tail-gate all come on mid-spec HR-V cars and above. Wireless phone charging, a premium audio system and part-leather upholstery are reserved for 'Advance Style', meanwhile.

HOW SPACIOUS IS THE HR-V?

Less than what you would probably expect and the reason is two-fold. Firstly, the middle section of the back seat is raised and narrow – a combination that makes it uncomfortable to sit on even for short periods of time. Secondly,

headroom is pretty average and that is a direct consequence of that rakish roofline, so it's a cramped experience for taller passengers. Acres of leg room, map pockets on the back of the front seats that also include a section to store your mobile phone, and USB charge points are all redeeming aspects. Buyers will also enjoy utilising the universally-liked cinema-style seats in the back where the squabs pivot upwards to free the room that lies beneath them. The cargo area is well-shaped and has a minimal load lip and 16-litres of additional under floor storage. But again, considering the HR-V's target audience, the 319-litre boot is much smaller than many rivals' and top-spec 'Advance Style' lose a further 15-litres. Folding the 60/40 split rear seats down leaves you with a 1,289-litre load space and an all-important flat floor.

A CLEVER PETROL-ELECTRIC POWERTRAIN

The Honda Jazz shares the same 'e:Hev' set-up with the HR-V and in both, the petrol-electric hybrid system ranks as one of the most enjoyable and very best we have tested to date. The engine is a 1.5-litre, four-cylinder but in light of the SUV's extra weight it has been uprated to 129bhp. Also bigger is the battery pack to give a fairly decent EV range in built-up areas. When the two e-motors come on grid, the 0-60mph dash is covered off in 10.6 seconds – decent performance for a car the prioritises family over fun and one that promises 52 miles-per-gallon on the combined cycle. The system seamlessly switches between petrol, electric and petrol-electric but a word of warning if you

need a burst of acceleration: the relative calm is shattered as the revs are sent through the roof, more so if 'Sport' mode is selected. Vibrations through the pedals and the steering wheel are other red marks in such situations. However, if you read the road and plan your overtake, this is less of a problem.

COMFORT IS THE WORD

The HR-V doesn't pretend to be anything it isn't from a driving perspective: safe, predictable and assured perfectly sum up this Japanese people mover. It is perched on a soft suspension that, for the most part, mops up lumps and bumps without breaking into much of a sweat and pleasantly wafts you along with little wind or road noise worth talking about. That bias-towards comfort doesn't necessarily mean the HR-V is as dull as dishwater to be at the wheel of; the steering is perfectly judged and a fairly taut body annuls the most extreme body roll.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Nippy performance
- ✓ Efficient hybrid powertrain
- ✓ Eye-catching design

- ✗ Noisy petrol engine
- ✗ Tight rear head room
- ✗ Cargo area is small



INTERIOR: Every HR-V features a 7-inch digital driver display and a 9-inch multimedia touchscreen which, again, is shared with the Jazz. From a user perspective the infotainment package is simple to figure out even if it is not as responsive as it should be. Perceived quality is definitely one of the car's undisputed strengths; the design is intriguing and the materials are plush and soft to touch.

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'S SUSPENSION':

Relying on active dampers as opposed to traditional passive springs, the S3 Saloon's Sport Suspension can be adjusted via the centre touchscreen to best suit the roads you are driving on. On the optional 19-inch rims the car still rides neatly on out-of-town roads when 'Dynamic' is chosen. Keep things in 'Comfort' and the sense of calm is even greater as the engine sound is dialled back a notch, too.



PRACTICALITY:

Longer and wider before makes the S3 Saloon a more enjoyable experience for those travelling in the back, with the extra head and leg room in both rows sure to be appreciated. The rear bench is ideally suited for two people; introduce a third person and not only will they end up rubbing shoulders but foot space will be severely restricted due to the transmission tunnel's height.



STYLING:

Riding 15mm closer to the road than the everyday saloon, the S3 also has a more aggressive front-end design that features air vents, a honeycomb grille and a special three-slot arrangement just below the bonnet that harks back to the company's S1 Group B rally car. The rear is defined by quad exhausts that play a sweet tune, and a boot-lid spoiler and diffuser for the lower half of the back bumper.



FIRST DRIVE: AUDI S3 SALOON VORSPRUNG S-TRONIC



SPECIFICATION

Price:
£47,555 (as tested)

Engine:
2-litre,
4cyl turbo petrol

Power/torque:
306bhp/295lb ft

Transmission:
7-speed automatic,
four-wheel drive

0-62mph:
4.8 seconds

Top speed:
155mph

Economy/CO2:
35.3mpg/181g/Km

If you are after something fast and practical perhaps a four-door saloon holds all the answers? The junior super saloon class has been a happy hunting ground for Audi with the S3 but if that is to continue it will have to beat the Mercedes-AMG A35 Saloon and BMW's M235i Gran Coupe at their own game.

By Jason Craig

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AN EXERCISE IN EVOLUTION

This new-generation S3 looks broadly similar to the car it replaces – a theme common to other nameplates in the Audi line-up – and for good reason: the previous model still looked fresh when it was retired. So, the headlight profile is unchanged and the same applies to the two-piece tail-lights. New, however, is the 'slotted' leading edge of the long bonnet – an apparent nod to the Group B winning Audi Sport Quattro from the Eighties – a large honeycomb grille, lightweight alloys, four functional exhausts and the usual array of skirts, spoilers and vents. Plump for 'Vorsprung' trim at a cost of £7,750 and you get a black styling pack, meatier 19-inch alloys, Matrix LED lights and a sports suspension with adaptive dampers.

WHAT ABOUT UNDERNEATH THE CAR?

Like its 5-door Sportback brother, the S3 Saloon uses the same platform and 7-speed dual-clutch gearbox as its predecessor, with minor changes applied to the steering and suspension. You no doubt will be left wondering what is new on the S3 – a view galvanized by the fact the same 2-litre, four-cylinder turbo petrol has been carried across. It does come with a bit more power – 10bhp more, to be precise – that bumps the headline figure to 306bhp. And as before, this is sent to all four corners through a Haldex system for superior traction and a rocketship 0-62mph time of 4.8 seconds. One new feature is 'Modular Dynamic Handling Control' – a computerised system that links the traction control system, adaptive dampers and torque distribution so this can be sent fully to the front, or rear, axle.

HOW DOES IT PERFORM ON OUR ROADS?

As a point and squirt car there are few better in this price range, helped along by that 2-litre engine that grows stronger as you rapidly approach the redline. Despite all that firepower, there isn't a great deal of play to be had from the chassis in the wet or dry as the Quattro system keeps you planted to the road around a bend before the torque slings you out of it. On top of fulsome brakes and steering that is accurate if a little short on feedback, it all makes the S3 an easy car to drive safe and fast. You can toggle between four drive options, from 'Efficiency' to 'Dynamic', with 'Individual' allowing owners to fine tune the acceleration and active dampers. Choosing the more extreme programmes also

ups the synthesised 5-cylinder warble that is pumped into the cabin. It's a different story for the exhausts because the pops and crackles they blurt out on the overrun are all real and bring a smile to the face.

WILL I NEED TO SEE A CHIROPRACTOR AFTER DRIVING IT?

Thankfully not. We found that even in the harshest setting the suspension was capable of mopping up cracks and crevices on country roads, with road noise not so much of an issue considering the low-profile tyres fitted to our test car. Sticking with 'Dynamic' for urban driving is probably best avoided as the car tends to fidget, so for ride quality that is a little bit more forgiving 'Comfort' solves this particular problem. The S3 Saloon also does the basics of everyday ownership well, too. It will swallow four average-sized adults and the longer load area of the boot – which can be opened via a button on the driver's door, just below the grab handle – pushes total volume up to 340-litres. However, being a saloon, there is the age-old problem of not having the hatchback's versatility of a full-height opening.

AN ON POINT INTERIOR

The S3 Saloon's cabin is the biggest change over the car it replaces. This time around you will find gloss black plastics, carbon fibre inserts and metal accents instead of soft-touch materials. The heated and electrically adjustable sports

seats are plush and really appeal because of the yellow stitching; they ooze sophistication and the same applies to the sharp and easy-to-use 10.1-inch infotainment screen. It works via touch inputs only but does provide haptic feedback to indicate you have made your desired selection from large, decipherable icons. A 10.25-inch digital driver instrument binnacle is standard but those after the full-size 12.3-inch 'Virtual Cockpit' can have that as part of the 'Vorsprung' pack. Audi has stuck with some buttons for functions such as the engine stop/start and traction control, turning on the heated seats, adjusting the fan speed and raising or lowering the cabin temperature. One novelty is the small circle on the passenger's half of the lower console that allows them – if you so wish – to turn the radio volume up or down by running their figure in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction.

PROS & CONS

- ✓ Refined and quick
- ✓ Slick-shifting gearbox
- ✓ Fantastic spec and tech

- ✗ Cabin quality is patchy
- ✗ Rivals are more rewarding
- ✗ Boot space isn't great



INTERIOR: If you opt for the regular S3 Saloon, the cabin still comes with all the technology and creature comforts you could wish for, including Audi's configurable driver display. The near £8,000 commanded by 'Vorsprung' is off-set by a wireless smartphone charging pad, ambient lighting, a panoramic sunroof and a Bang and Olufsen sound system. It also ups the number of driver safety devices considerably.