

Sat, 01 Aug-15; Overdrive; Size : 3223 sq.cm.; Page : 52



Back in the game

Ford India to debut one of the most sensational sub 4-metre sedans in the segment, the Figo Aspire!

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Almost every mass carmaker today has to produce an automobile that belongs to the compact sedan segment or run the risk of getting left behind. Ford did enter the sub-4m category earlier on by introducing the EcoSport. The SUV has done well for them but that hasn't stopped Ford from introducing another all-new car - the sedan based on the second generation Figo. It's the Figo Aspire and we've just driven the latest compact sedan on the block.

DESIGN AND STYLING

The Figo Aspire features Ford's Kinetic design language that aims at offering a premium and dynamic character. The face is smart thanks to the bold hexagonal chrome grille, the four slats are spaced well and the car does look quite premium. The bonnet is well sculpted and features a prominent bulge highlighted by two vertical lines running from the Ford badge until the windshield. The lines go on to neatly blend with the depression on the roof, adding to the design theme.

The swooping headlamps are large and look like an evolved version of the current Figo unit. A lower grille neatly integrates with the bumper while the latter houses circular fog lamps as well and features a definition line between the lamps.

The side could have been bland but the wrap-around headlamps and the prominent shoulder line add some flavour. A chrome insert has been used in place of the indicator on the fender. Seen here is the top Titanium variant that gets indicators mounted on the mirror instead of the

fender. The window line rises as it flows to the rear and another line runs parallel to it on the body.

The 14-inch eight-spoke alloy wheels look stylish and go well with the overall design. The wheel fills up the arch quite well. The tail lamps are visible from the side too. To keep the car under 4m in length, the rear end had to be shortened and that is quite obvious from this angle. Like most compact sedans today, the short rear end gives the side a disproportionate look and is more notchback than sedan.

The rear is a smart design too. The D-shaped tail lamps look striking but don't feature LED lighting. And again, like most compact sedans today, the Figo Aspire also gets a chrome strip that runs across the width of the car. However, the strip would have merged better with the reverse tail lamp section if it were slightly thicker. As mentioned before, the rear has been shortened so the bumper is almost fully flat. But a mock diffuser like insert and a few creases add to the styling.

INTERIOR AND SPACE

Step inside and one is greeted by a stylish interior. The dashboard seems familiar because the design theme is similar to the EcoSport. The steering wheel, centre console and information screen look very similar to the EcoSport and Fiesta. There are dual-tone black/beige dash and beige seats and door pads. Depending on the variant, there are either gloss black or silver finished inserts.

There are controls on the steering wheel too. The light blue backlit instrument clus-

FORD IS A LATECOMER TO THIS SEGMENT AND HAS THEREFORE HAD TO ENSURE THE FIGO ASPIRE OFFERS A LONG LIST OF FEATURES

ter is pleasant looking but the dials could have been slightly larger. The air vents in the side are circular and feature chrome detailing in the top variant. Headlamp switches are new and placed below the driver side air vent. The boot release button is also placed next to it and is easy to access. The auto climate control switches feel premium and are well detailed. The driving position is good and visibility too, thanks to a large glass area. The outside rearview mirrors are positioned well but could have offered a larger viewing area like in the EcoSport. The Figo Aspire is the first Ford to feature indicator and light control stalks positioned the conventional way. So you use the right stalk to control the headlamps and indicator while the left controls the wiper and windshield washer. Overall interior fit and finish is impressive, better than most we've seen in the segment and an improvement, even over the EcoSport.

Ford claims there are as many as 20 storage points inside the car. There's a storage point on the side of the dashboard that can be accessed when the door is open. Door mounted bottle holders are large and can accommodate more than one bottle if needed.

The seats are comfortable and even feature leather upholstery (first in segment). There is good support up front but the rear seats could have offered more sup-

port and feel a bit short in length. The rear knee-room isn't best in segment but is still very impressive. To maximise room at the rear, the front seats have been scooped out. Shoulder room could have been better, seating three adults in the back can be a bit of a squeeze. The floor isn't fully flat too so it is good only for two adults. A rear armrest is also offered. Boot space at 359 litres, isn't as much as the Amaze or the Xcent but it is quite usable. The loading height is good and the boot is deep too.

ENGINES

The Figo Aspire is available with three engine options. A 1.5l TDCi diesel and two petrol engines (1.2-litre and 1.5-litre Ti-VCT). The diesel motor is from the EcoSport and Fiesta but has been tweaked to offer more power. The engine now produces 100PS and 215Nm of torque and is mated to a 5-speed manual transmission. Expect the Ford siblings to soon offer this motor too. On the road, power delivery is linear and the engine breathes well. There is not much turbo lag and there is a good surge of power from lower revs. It is slightly noisy at idle and lower speeds but as the revs climb, the clatter settles and feels a lot more refined than a few of the other cars from this segment. Gearshifts are smooth too and the ratios are spaced out well, making full use of the impressive torque. The





claimed fuel economy figure of 25.83kmpl too is impressive.

The petrol 1.2l motor is a heavily tweaked unit that's derived from the current Figo hatchback. The engine now receives variable valve timing on both the intake and exhaust sides, apart from other updates. The Ti-VCT (as it's called) engine produces 88PS of max power and 112Nm of torque. This engine is mated to a 5-speed manual transmission. It's a refined motor but low-end power delivery is weak and it affects driveability. One needs to change gears often too and it isn't as involving to drive when compared to other 1.2-litre petrol powered cars. The automatic transmission variant, however, gets the larger 1.5-litre petrol also seen in the EcoSport and Fiesta. The unit produces 112PS and 136Nm of max power and torque. This variant even features ESP, traction control and hill launch assist. The hill assist system basically prevents the car

The Figo Aspire features a stylish front end thanks to the swooping headlamps and large hexagonal front grille. Shoulder line runs from the fender and neatly integrates with the tail lamp. 14-inch multi-spoke wheels are stylish and fill wheel arches well. Rear end is more notchback than sedan. Bumper is flat but gets good detailing. Chrome strip is only for India

from rolling back by applying the brake for a few seconds. The claimed fuel economy figures are 18.16kmpl and 17kmpl for the 1.2l and 1.5l variants respectively.

RIDE AND HANDLING

The Figo Aspire is based on a modified Figo platform. The latter is essentially the older Fiesta without a boot and is known for its dynamics. The Figo Aspire however doesn't really carry forward this character. Like a lot of Ford enthusiasts, we too expected the car to feel as direct as the Figo/old Fiesta but it isn't. It even features a new electric steering seen in the EcoSport and Fiesta that is a lot lighter in feel and can do with some more feedback. The chassis is well balanced but gone is that fun

to drive feel from the outgoing Figo. But it still is one of the better handling compact sedans out there. The 14-inch Apollo tyres are quite grippy and aid handling. The car rides well over bumpy and broken roads. In fact, it is better than most of its rivals (we'll confirm when we compare the Aspire with the rivals soon). There isn't much suspension noise either and the car stays planted at high speeds too. The brakes offer good bite and the ABS is tuned well.

FEATURES

Every car from this segment offers something unique. Ford has therefore taken its time to enter the segment and has had to ensure the Figo Aspire offers a long list of



Interior follows new Ford theme. It is stylish and well built too. Centre console and various parts get gloss black inserts in the top variants. Instrument console looks good but could have been larger. Lamp and boot release switches are new and positioned below air vent. The rearview mirror gets electric fold function but the viewing area could have been larger. Rear knee-room is impressive for a compact sedan. Three engine options are on offer. Bonnet bulge merges with the roof lines



Compact sedans on the horizon

If you thought the Figo Aspire is late to the compact sedan party, well, there are more latecomers on their way too.

Volkswagen is readying a compact sedan based on the same PQ25 platform that underpins the Polo and the Vento and will offer choices of 1.2-litre petrol and 1.5-litre diesel engines. The design will be in line with the Polo and the Vento, VW aims to offer class-leading build quality and should have the car ready in time for the 2016 Auto Expo. Skoda could jump the bandwagon too and mould their own version from the VW sedan.

While the Europeans will boast of quality, the Japanese could demonstrate their low-cost engineering through a Datsun compact sedan spawned from the frugal platform that underpins the Renault Kwid and the upcoming Datsun redi-Go. If it gets the green signal, expect 800cc petrol and 1.0-litre turbo-diesel options, while the cabin design and equipment could be similar to its cross-themed counterparts.

Tata will give the Zest a smaller sibling in the form of a compact sedan based on the upcoming Kite hatchback. Though based on a rehashed XO platform from the ageing Indica, it will wear Tata's new design philosophy. Power options are said to come from a 1.2-litre naturally aspirated petrol engine and a 1.05-litre diesel. AMT would be offered too, alongside a 5-speed manual transmission,

features and equipment. The car will be available in four trim levels namely – Ambiente, Trend, Titanium and Titanium+. The Ambiente trim offers standard equipment such as dual tone interior, adjustable front and rear headrests, front power windows, tilt adjust steering, multi information display, keyless entry, electric boot release and driver and passenger airbags.

The Trend adds front fog lamps, gloss black interior elements, rear armrest, steering mounted controls, rear power windows, mobile phone dock and a Bluetooth stereo with four speakers. The Titanium trim also gets auto climate control, power fold mirrors, ABS with EBD and an adjustable driver's seat. The Titanium+ is the fully loaded variant so it gets segment first leather seats, the 4.2-inch information screen with Sync, CD player, side and passenger airbags (very impressive and first in segment but passengers don't get grab handles), Ford MyKey (a programmable key that when inserted can limit speed and stereo volume level).

All trims will be available in seven different shades. Optional accessories like illuminated scuff plates, rear parking sensors (should have been offered as standard),

mirror mounted reverse camera and GPS, ambient lighting and a shark fin antenna will also be available at Ford dealerships.

SUMMING IT UP

The Ford Figo Aspire arrives late to the compact sedan party but has the potential to do well and appeal to a lot of buyers. The car is stylish, is good on quality, drives well, offers various engine options including a powerful and efficient diesel motor and most importantly, gets a long list of standard safety and comfort features. The car goes on sale in August. We expect Ford to price the car well too, more on par with the segment rivals. **OD**

FORD FIGO ASPIRE

Type	1.5-litre, inline-4, turbo diesel 1.2-litre, inline-4, petrol
Max power	100PS@3,750rpm 88PS@6,300rpm
Max torque	215Nm@1,750-3,000rpm 112Nm@4,000rpm
LxWxH (mm)	3995x1695x1525
Price	₹5.5-8.5 lakh (ex-Mumbai, est)
+ Design, ride quality, diesel motor	
- Boot space, petrol performance	