

Review: The 2013 Ford Fusion Lives Up To Its Name

BY ERIC TEGLER | JAN 14, 2012 | 12:57 PM | PERMALINK



Say you're waiting for the light to change so you can take the crosswalk to the next block. A 2011 Ford Fusion drives by. What are the odds you could identify it if your buddy said, "Quick, what make of car is that?"

The odds aren't good. From a looks standpoint, Ford's mid-size sedan has been an appliance-y thing since its debut in 2006--a rolling toaster, largely indistinct from Toyota, Chevrolet, and Honda offerings. That's going to change this year.

The new Fusion brings together several European design influences, five different powertrains, improved telematics and materials to create a car you're much more likely to remember--a Fusion that lives up to its name.

The design emphasis is on "premium-ness" according to Fusion designer, Christopher Hamilton, who points to the car's jewel-like grille, squinting projector headlights, wrap around LED taillights, profile character lines and sweeping roofline as evidence. Clearly, Ford has aimed to incorporate some of the Euro-style that Americans often identify as "premium".

The new Fusion's shape is similar to that of the Mondeo sedan Ford sells globally with hints of Audi A4. The front fascia is reminiscent of various Aston Martin models. There's even a new Blue Oval badge above the grille. The look is firmly a part of Ford's "Kinetic 2.0" design language Hamilton says. I say it'll take some getting used to but it certainly stands out among the mid-size competition.

The design language continues inside where you'll find more space thanks to the 2012 Fusion's larger dimensions. You'll touch higher quality dash and seat materials and scan the Fusion's Smartphone-influenced center stack and instrument cluster. Touch-sensitive buttons on the center console and video display have been enlarged for easier actuation and all switchgear is now higher quality. A simplified Sync/MyFordTouch infotainment system integrates phones, PDAs and digital media players with more intuitive operation via voice commands, touch-screen inputs, or steering wheel controls. We'll need more time with the system to see if it's truly a step ahead.

2013 Ford Fusion
 Power: 170-237 hp, 170-250 lb-ft.
 Engines: 2.5L 4 cylinder
 2.0L Atkinson Cycle 4-cylinder, AC Synchronous Motor
 Fuel Consumption: 26-47 city/37-44 highway
 100 MPGe (Energi)

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There's ample driver-assist technology available including Ford's Active Park Assistance which will automatically parallel park the Fusion with the driver controlling the brake and throttle. Adaptive cruise control, blind-spot and lane monitoring systems aid in keeping you on course and there's even optically-enabled driver monitoring. If the system senses driver fatigue, a "coffee" icon lights on the instrument panel. Hill-start assist is available on manual *and* automatic transmission models.

On the driving side, the Fusion offers an entirely new chassis with more high-strength steel for increased stiffness/safety, new suspension and steering. The ride/handling balance should be dynamically similar to the previous smaller car though the new Fusion should be significantly quieter. Extended seat-time will tell for sure. The five available powertrain choices (all available at launch) emphasize efficiency. The Fusion is now possessed of an all four-cylinder lineup.

Joining the carry-over 2.5 liter engine are new 1.6 and 2.0 "Ecoboost" fours producing (?) and 237 horsepower respectively. Choose the 2.0 liter and you can have optional all-wheel-drive and a six-speed automatic with paddle-shift capability. The 1.6 will be available with a manual or automatic transmission and an automatic start/stop feature. So equipped, the Fusion should get a best-in-in-class 26 city/37 highway MPG according to Ford.

Better yet in fuel efficiency terms will be the Fusion Hybrid and Fusion Energi plug-in hybrid. The Fusion Hybrid blends an Atkinson-cycle 2.0 liter with Ford's third-generation hybrid electric drive which includes new software and hardware developed in-house. The system does entirely without belt-driven accessories, the a/c compressor, steering pump, etc. being electrically powered. A new regenerative brake system captures up to 95 percent of the kinetic energy created when you push the brake pedal. The Fusion Hybrid is expected to return 47 city/44 highway MPG.

The Fusion Energi offers the foregoing tech with plug-in capability in a package significantly larger than either the Chevrolet Volt or Toyota Prius plug-in hybrids. The Energi will come with full mobile phone connectivity and a specialized app for monitoring vehicle charge, range, and more. Ford says the Fusion Energi should achieve 100-plus MPGe without the range concerns that still affect full electric vehicles. That said, don't be surprised to see a full electric Fusion at some point in the future.

In my opinion, both hybrids enjoy the same advantage that the previous Fusion Hybrid did - they don't scream "hybrid". Minor badging aside, the emphasis is on a handsome, capacious sedan that is likewise highly fuel efficient. No "statement" necessary.

Bottom Line

The 2012 Fusion will be the first mid-size Ford sedan in recent memory to incorporate a global design/platform with a range of fuel efficient conventional and alternative power choices matched by state-of-the-art driver assist and infotainment systems. All of it goes into a package intended to raise the bar in the medium-priced mid-sized sedan segment with breakout style and dynamics. The market will let us know shortly if Ford's Fusion is succeeding.

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David January 14th, 2012 at 02:25 PM

Looks like a aston in the front.

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Jim January 14th, 2012 at 04:20 PM

The Fusion is one of the most distinctive looking cars on the road. It looks nothing like a Toyota, Chevrolet or Honda.

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Matt January 14th, 2012 at 10:46 PM

Jim's right, the current Fusion doesn't look like anything else. But I agree with the article that it does look like an appliance. It's not an attractive car. However, this new one is the best car I've seen from any American maker in many years. I've actually never been this excited over an American car. But now how American is this car? It's probably designed by Ford of Europe who has long produced far more desirable cars than Ford in America.

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The Nervous Cat January 15th, 2012 at 01:10 AM

I happen to own one of those current appliance looking Fusions and I still like it, despite buying a 2012 knowing the car would be redesigned for 2013. Yes, I have new Fusion envy but I try to rationalize it by convincing myself that my older tried and true platform had the defects worked out over many years. :-)

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Fred Austin January 15th, 2012 at 09:49 PM

I own a 2010 white platinum Fusion hybrid and it is probably one of the best of the 68 cars I've owned! I ordered it fully loaded and have 30K+ miles on it. The only thing that broke was the driver's inside door handle which was fixed as a warranty item. The engine is very responsive and it surprises many a car drivers with its pull-away power. I don't care for the engine drone coupled with the CVT transmission although both work well together, I would have preferred/designed a six speed automatic instead. I especially like the remote start in summer and winter and would have designed better looking twin-pipe exhaust tips (too small). Voice activation system stills needs improvement. I'd buy again and might do so in 2013.

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dave January 18th, 2012 at 12:01 PM

I do not own a 2011 Ford Fusion, but the way you lump it with the previous models, by calling it a toaster, is wrong. The 2013 Fusion looks positively Korean. If you don't like the 2011 Ford Fusion's body, you have something wrong with you.

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