

The original, v4.0 BY JOE SAGE

The world of SUVs was quite different 20 years ago. Most were full-size (or bigger) or mid-size. Most were body-on-frame. The term “crossover” had not yet been coined. Compact utilities were mostly Asian, with a few passing exceptions you could count on about a hand and a half.

Then along came Ford (already making the top-selling midsize body-on-frame Explorer, not to mention the top-selling pickup truck) with something new—the little Ford Escape, which brought the general two-box style and bearing (as well as a good degree of the capability) of their other SUVs, but in compact form. It was an immediate hit.

For the next two decades, through evolutions in the segment of size, style, terminology, and general lifestyle and usage—and as a great many more vehicles have joined in—Escape has easily kept pace, continued to define it, or both.

Its fundamentals have proven very durable. Two generations of more SUV-like two-box styling lasted 12 years. Gen three brought more curvaceous crossover styling, echoed again in the 2020 Escape driven here—generation four.

The new Escape looks a bit carlike from the front, almost Focus-like, which makes sense if Ford carries through on its vow to quit building all cars except Mustang and Ford GT. (As they say, if a child draws “a car” these days, it’s likely to be a small SUV.) From the rear, it’s more SUV-like, belying its curvy profile, and handsome—it could pass as a small Lincoln, with its individual-letter bad-

ging. Power and ride with this 250-hp EcoBoost are SUV-solid and satisfying. The auto start-stop system is one of the most invisible we’ve seen.

Although this is the most aerodynamic Escape yet (achieved via both body and underbody), headroom, legroom and cargo volume are notably generous. All rear dimensions are up from the prior generation, and sliding rear seats provide the most rear legroom ever in EcoBoost models like ours.

Some specs are not yet available, but while engine power is increased by five horses, weight is reduced by some 200 pounds, so expect improvements in MPG. For further fuel economy, Escape—the first SUV to offer a hybrid, in 2005—offers a hybrid that extends range from about 400 miles to over 550; and test results have just come through for the Escape Plug-In Hybrid, reporting 100 MPGe with 37 miles of full-electric range.

Our SEL is next-to-top trim, though priced closer to the base S model than to the top Titanium, yet nicely featured and finished inside and out. There are many trim-drivetrain combinations, all kept within a fairly narrow price walk. You can buy a top trim Titanium Hybrid for about the same as a next-to-lowest SE trim Plug-In Hybrid. Similarly, you can get our mid-trim SEL as a Plug-In Hybrid, at almost the same cost as a non-hybrid Titanium.

Those are just two of many such trim/powertrain comparisons possible when shopping the new Escape. It could be a tough call, or could be the easiest part—it’s really a win-only scenario. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

PLANT	..... Louisville, Kentucky
ENGINE MFG	..... Cleveland, Ohio or Valencia, Spain
ENGINE	..... 2.0L EcoBoost alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	..... 250 hp / 275 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	..... 9.3:1
DRIVETRAIN	..... intelligent AWD w disconnect (FWD avail)
TRANSMISSION	..... 8-spd auto, SelectShift, paddles
SUSPENSION	..... na
STEERING	..... na
BRAKES	..... 4-wheel disc
WHEELS	..... 18" machined-face alum w dark pockets
TIRES	..... 225/60R18 AS
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	..... 180.5 / 106.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	..... na
HEADROOM (F/R)	..... 40.0 / 39.3 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	..... 42.4 / 38.8 in
CARGO CAPACITY	..... 37.5 / 65.4 cu.ft
TOW CAPACITY	..... na
WEIGHT	..... (AWD) 3566 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	..... .87 oct min 91+ rec / 15.8 gal
MPG	..... na

BASE PRICE	\$29,265
EQUIP GROUP 301A: 2.0L EcoBoost start/stop, SelectShift w paddles, AWD, class II trailer tow pkg, pano roof	..... 3385
CO-PILOT360™ w adaptive cruise w stop-go, voice-activated touchscreen nav w pinch-to-zoom	..... 695
DESTINATION CHARGE	..... 1245

TOTAL	\$34,590
<i>(Early sample; pricing reconstructed without vehicle sticker info.)</i>	

MODELS:

S	\$24,885
SE	27,105
SE Sport Hybrid	28,265
SE Plug-In Hybrid	33,040
SEL	29,265
SEL Plug-In Hybrid	35,620
Titanium Hybrid	33,550
Titanium	36,435
Titanium Plug-In Hybrid	38,835

