

Like it never left

BY JOE SAGE

OUR FIRST HANDS-ON TASTE OF THE NEW THREE-VEHICLE BRONCO FAMILY

Bronco is back—and although everything is utterly updated for the new millennium, it's like seeing an old friend after a long time, as all the years in between just disappear. Even if you've never owned a Bronco, you can easily feel that something very important has just made it home.

It's a move that has been long rumored, and Ford finally found everything aligning—significantly their own corporate moves toward more SUVs, an emphasis on “icon” brands and models, and the creation of “families” around those icons. (It's what brings us the Mustang Mach-E, along with moves into EV territory in that case, also.)

Ford Bronco Sport, driven here, is one of three Bronco family members all launched simultaneously, straight out of the chute. (While Mustang waited decades to become a family, this move suddenly makes the whole company-wide plan click.)

The other two Bronco family members—Bronco Two-Door and Four-Door—are most like the original gen-one machine, maximum off-roaders (with plenty of appetite for daily use, too). Bronco Sport gives the family another dimension, with a layout a little more familiar to a wider set of SUV/crossover buyers, great for daily use (with plenty of appetite for off-road adventure, too).

Bronco Sport has the least expensive entry point among the three, though not by much—\$1840 overall (against the Bronco Two-Door). Against the Four-Door, however (the Sport's clearer functional alternative), Sport starts \$6540 lower.

All three have very wide trim ranges. Our Sport's Big Bend trim is second-up (by just \$1340) among four available trims (five when you add a limited-run First Edition this year). As you would expect, it does not have some features that kick in when you move to higher trims. Our Big Bend has rugged cloth seats, no seat-mirror memory, power seats but without tilt, that kind of thing. Its infotainment screen is as complete as any (we suspect), including some pretty entertaining rough and rugged animated graphics when you fire it up.

Though Bronco Sport is bound to appeal to a

wide range of buyers with mainstream needs, its off-road chops are not to be sold short. Wheel sizes and related clearance and approach angle specifications grow as you move up the line, too, as does the engine if you move all the way to the top of the list.

Differentiating Bronco Sport from more mundane SUVs are Bronco staples: its H.O.S.S. (High-Performance Off-Road Stability Suspension) system and its G.O.A.T. Modes (Goes Over Any Type of Terrain), selectable for normal, eco, sport, slippery or sand (leaving it up to us to decide whether a particular snowfall is wet or dry). Ground clearance is average, approach angles are healthy, it tows up to 2000 lb when equipped, and it has unusually good water fording range, almost a foot and a half.

Engine power is a differentiator. The first three Bronco Sports bear a 1.5-liter EcoBoost turbo with a reasonable 181 hp and 190 lb-ft of torque. Ford doesn't make a lot of noise about the fact this is a three-cylinder, but perhaps they should—we first drove a 1.0-liter EcoBoost three-cylinder at their Dearborn Development Center test track in Michigan back in 2012, and it blew us away. With a weight under 3500 lb, the engine performed quite well in our Bronco Sport, and while our sticker didn't state fuel mileage, EPA reportedly has it at 28 mpg highway. If budget allowed, though, we'd also take a look at the Badlands (and this year also First Edition) for its 2.0L EcoBoost four-cylinder putting out 250 hp and 277 lb-ft, reportedly getting 26 mpg highway, and of

course with more features at higher cost.

Check out the build and dimensional specs for our Big Bend in the sidebar. You can compare all three Broncos and all trim levels online to parse exactly where this one sits, point by point. Or do as we did and just take it straight out into the wild.

Driving around town, as a customer will in any brief test drive, is useful to a point. But we're able to go well beyond that, so we did, taking our Bronco Sport on some rough and rocky roads we visit regularly. It's not major rock crawling—with pandemic rules, there's no spotter along, for one thing—but it's a really rocky road with notable high points in its rocks. It tests your traction, ground clearance in general, articulation, the ruggedness of the whole setup—if anything went wrong, you'd find yourself quite far from home very fast as the sun goes down—and in all counts, the Bronco Sport is quite impressive. This is one rugged little utility.

Between capabilities and its prominent Bronco badging, even someone who never leaves town and treats it like just another SUV will find plenty of bragging points in hand. But you'll really want to take it somewhere adventuresome when you can, or you're going to miss a lot.

The Bronco brand was away from us for a quarter century—even the newest of older Broncos now qualify for vintage plates—yet the world never forgot about it, nor did Ford forget about the world that was clamoring for its return.

We now of course look forward to some time in its big siblings, the Bronco Two- and Four-Door. ■



One look at the bucking bronc logo and our first thought was it was worth bringing the Ford Bronco back just for that, as solid a mascot as the Mustang running horse that's been with us for over 50 years straight.

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY.....	Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico
ENGINE BUILD.....	Chihuahua, Mexico
SEATING.....	five
ENGINE.....	1.5L EcoBoost 3-cyl turbo alum/alum block/head, DOHC, TI-VCT, composite intake manifold, integrated exhaust manifold, alum pistons, powder forged rods, cast iron crankshaft
HP/TORQUE.....	181 hp / 190 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN.....	4x4 w air-cooled PTU, disconnectable drive-shaft, single clutch RDU
TRANSMISSION.....	8-spd automatic
G.O.A.T. MODES™.....	Goes Over Any Type of Terrain: selectable modes: Normal, Eco, Sport, Slippery, Sand
FINAL RATIO.....	3.81
CRAWL RATIO.....	18:1
CHASSIS / SUSPENSION.....	H.O.S.S. System F: indep MacPherson strut-type w coils, stblzr bar, twin-tube hydraulic gas-pressurized shocks; steel subframe w alum lower control arm and cast knuckle; R: indep dbl lateral link semi-trailing arms w coils, stblzr bar & monotube hydraulic gas-pressurized shocks; isolated steel subframe w cast knuckle
STEERING.....	elec power-assisted (EPAS)
BRAKES.....	vacuum standard (elec optional) F: 16" vented, single piston; R: 16", single piston, elec park function
WHEELS.....	17" carbonized high-gloss alum
TIRES.....	225/65R17 A/S
LENGTH / WHEELBASE.....	172.7 / 105.1 in
HEIGHT / WIDTH.....	70.2 / (excl mirrors) 74.3 in
TRACK, CURB (F/R).....	63.4 / 62.8 in
TURNING CIRCLE.....	37.4
HEADROOM (F/R).....	41.5 / 41.7 in
LEGROOM (F/R).....	42.4 / 36.9 in
CARGO CAPACITY.....	32.5 / 65.2 cu.ft
GROUND CLEARANCE.....	7.8 in
PTU TO GROUND (F/R).....	9.4 / 8.7 in
OVERHANG (F/R).....	33.7 / 33.9 in
APPRCH / DEP / BRKOVER.....	21.7 / 30.4 / 18.2°
WATER FORDING.....	17.7 in
PAYLOAD / TOW CAPACITY.....	1170 / 2000 lb
WEIGHT.....	3457 lb
FUEL CAPACITY.....	16 gal
MPG.....	na

BASE PRICE.....	\$28,160
BIG BEND INCLUDES: cloth front bucket seats, rubberized cargo floor, SecuriCode keyless entry keypad, zipper pockets w Molle strap system (front seatbacks), LED foglamps, 17-in carbonized gray-painted high gloss alum wheels, terrain mgmt system (TMS) w five G.O.A.T. Modes™, safari style roof.	
BIG BEND PKG: power moonroof, reverse sensing system, wireless charging pad, heated front seats.....1595	
ALTO BLUE METALLIC.....	395
FORD CO-PILOT360 ASSIST+: adaptive cruise w stop-&-go & lane centering, evasive steering assist, voice-activated touchscreen nav w pinch-to-zoom compatibility, SiriusXM Traffic & Travel Links, speed sign recog.....795	
DESTINATION CHARGE.....	1495
TOTAL.....	\$32,440

BRONCO SPORT MODELS / TRIMS

Base.....	Starts at \$26,820
Big Bend.....	Adventure-ready upgrade
Outer Banks.....	Leather, tech, style upgrades
Badlands.....	Maximum off-road model
First Edition.....	Badlands-based lmted run 2000x