



TIM BARNES-CLAY

Motoring

HOT WHEELS

Studies over the years have highlighted many reasons why we have a fondness for our cars. Some suggest it's because they have an identifiable face, or that they're an extension of ourselves. But, we think it's more straightforward than that. Our set-of-wheels mean a lot to us because of everything they let us do and for the secure space they let us enjoy on the way.

We don't think *Sorted's* motoring editor, Tim Barnes-Clay, will ever fall out of love with cars. And to prove it, he's been testing the following motors for us since the last issue.

Fast Facts

(520d M Sport Saloon – as tested)

Max. speed: 146mph
 0-62mph: 7.5 secs
 Combined mpg: 65.7
 Engine layout: 1.995cc 4-cylinder turbo diesel
 Max. power (PS): 190
 CO2: 114g/km
 Price: £39,835

2017 BMW 5 Series

For more than 40 years, the German-made BMW 5 Series has been salivated over by senior managers across the world.

The estate model is awesome, but it's the saloon that gets pulses racing. The booted 5 still exudes more kudos than many exec motors – and the seventh embodiment of this Bavarian brute has shown the likes of Audi and Mercedes-Benz that the 5 Series will always be a hard nut to crack.

The 2017 BMW 5 Series is faster and lighter than the resigning model – it's also more cost-effective. Unsurprisingly, the car is bloated with better technology and it's been given a shot in the arm in the comfort division.

It's a good-looking machine, too – with a conventionally handsome exterior not radically different from the withdrawing model, but now a little more like its larger, 7 Series sibling. The understated changes could possibly be perceived as lazy, but BMW has tried to craft braver shapes before and it hasn't been a popular move. So, looking like a compact BMW 7 Series is no bad thing for the fresh 5 Series.

Inside is a similar story – the car is visually very alike the retiring 5 Series. If you've driven an up-to-date BMW, you'll be familiar with the arrangement of the controls,

but there's now an added emphasis on quality. While the previous generation BMW 5 Series had a decent cabin, it had dropped behind Mercedes' E-Class, in terms of finish and style; it just didn't feel as superior. From a design viewpoint, some may feel that's still the case, but now the quality is more than a match for its competitor's offerings.

Tech has developed to the point where autonomous technologies are being drip-fed into new vehicles. For that reason, this latest generation BMW 5 Series has the ability to autonomously accelerate, brake and steer around obstacles – ideal for long-haul driving. The 5 Series can also park itself without you being inside it. This is achieved via BMW's new 'remote control' key. The tech is truly remarkable, but you must have the patience to put your faith into it.

The state-of-the-art BMW is good for five-up, and the boot boasts 530-litres of cargo space. This is great for a big shopping trip or for some golf bags. That said, the boot is a bit

clumsy to load, because of its shape.

General build quality outshines any other 5 Series – and that's saying something. The 2017 5 Series is magnificently finished and the Bavarian brand has stepped up in providing the first-rate, refined feel the former 5 Series was starting to leave behind.

On the move, the new 5 Series is everything you could hope for. In the driver's seat, you're comfortably low-slung, and the vibrant clocks and wraparound dashboard make you feel like you're at the controls of an aeroplane. All the switchgear operates with a graceful action and it falls easily to hand.

Even though the cutting-edge BMW 5 Series is broader by 6mm and longer by 36mm, the four-cylinder, 190ps, 520d M Sport Saloon we drove tugs like a train. The 0-62mph sprint is over in a mere 7.5 seconds – and the top speed is 146mph.

Steer into a snaking slice of tarmac and the booted 520d M Sport answers promptly to

“The car is bloated with better technology and it's been given a shot in the arm in the comfort division.”



your input, while the BMW's Comfort, Sport and ECO PRO settings – each shifting the steering response throttle and – will fit your temperament, as well as weather and road conditions, faultlessly.

But, let's be blunt; 2017's 5 Series will be used to Hoover up motorway miles more often than being hammered through hairpins. We had no concerns gliding at 70mph up and down the UK's motorway network for this test. Indeed, the feisty 5 Series smooths out bumps and lumps, making any kind of blacktop – even pothole-peppered tarmac – feel decent.

Anticipate forking out £39,835 for the 190ps BMW 2017 520d M Sport Saloon we assessed. But if you are a professional selecting this as your company vehicle, it will give you those reduced emissions you will want for reduced benefit in kind tax demands. This energetic model emits only 114g/km of CO₂ – and you'll be happy to hear it will return up to 65.7mpg. →



2017 SEAT Leon

I've just spent seven days behind the wheel of the newest Leon – the three or five-door hatchback from Spanish automaker, SEAT. The contemporary model isn't groundbreaking in looks – more progressive – and that is no bad thing. After all, why take a scalpel to an already fetching face?

The Leon's cousin is the VW Golf – and that, too, has been fine-tuned of late. The Spaniard is better looking than the German, but then beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. It's less pricey to purchase, as well. I drove the FR Technology five-door variant, equipped with a 1.4 TSI 150 petrol unit.

What's different? Well, the Leon's lights and grille have been given a slightly sharper look, but you'd have to really squint to notice. Then the FR model has been given full LED headlights, and its twin tailpipes denote that it has more spirit than the Leons below it.

The hatchback's six-speed manual transmission is easy-going and meticulous in finding the correct gears. The steering is nicely responsive, too. Might stems from the 1.4 petrol turbo powerplant – a smart unit that locks off half the cylinders, which helps conserve fuel. The Leon, in FR guise, is not a hot-hatch, but it's a warm hatchback, with zero to 62mph realisable in 8.0 seconds. Additionally, due to that cylinder shut-off ingenuity, you can squeeze 57.6mpg out of the tank.

The Leon FR Technology's strength is tallied with good handling, and the SEAT adheres to apexes like epoxy resin. This is due to the FR's 17-inch alloys and dropped suspension. The

only disadvantage is the hard ride, which is perceptible on pitted road surfaces. Luckily, well-padded seats help make up for the car's rigidity, and they're fantastic at keeping you supported when entering and exiting tight bends.

The SEAT Leon's cabin is well-judged, with ample room in the front and rear. Natty touches, for example: piano black trim, a touchscreen system and an electric handbrake make the car's interior feel more chic than the preceding model's. The touchscreen tablet-esque media system kicks most of the buttons that used to be in the Leon to the kerb. This tidies the instrument panel up no end. Regrettably, regularly having to hunt for a function on the touchscreen can prove a little disrupting at times.

The FR gets surplus kit packed into it as well, comprising: Apple CarPlay and Android Auto; satnav; rear parking sensors; dual-zone climate control and cruise control. Furthermore, the boot is more than adequate, with a load capacity of 380 litres. It's not the largest, but it equals the Golf's – and it trounces the popular Ford Focus' boot, which only offers 316 litres. So, yes, there is far more to the new SEAT Leon than its looks. It's unquestionably less conformist than a Volkswagen Golf or a ubiquitous Ford Focus, and you happen to get a lot of motor for your money. Also, the 1.4 TSI 150 powerplant offers more 'oomph' than lesser petrol-propelled Leons. Plus, it's quicker and less costly to buy than the 150ps diesel version.

Fast Facts

(Leon FR Technology 1.4 Eco TSI 150PS – as tested)

Max. speed:
134mph
0-62mph:
8.0 secs
Combined mpg:
57.6
Engine layout:
1395cc four-cylinder petrol turbo
Max. power (PS):
150
CO₂: 114g/km
Price: £21,350

“The Leon's cousin is the VW Golf – and that, too, has been fine-tuned of late. The Spaniard is better looking than the German.”





2017 Renault Koleos

Renault took a decision to get rid of the Koleos from Britain seven years ago. But the French automaker reckons the latter half of 2017 is a better time to usher in an all-new version to the UK's shores.

The Renault Koleos is another sport utility vehicle (SUV), so the likelihood is it should do OK. Why? Well, because sales of SUVs are incredibly popular in Great Britain. It also gives Renault a good reason to complete its sport utility family. This means that if you're currently driving a Kadjar or Captur, you could work your way towards owning a Koleos.

The Koleos' direct rival is the popular X-Trail from Nissan. The word 'rival' might be a bit strong because both SUVs sit on the same platform. In fact, if you think of it as an X-Trail prettification you wouldn't be too far off beam. And things are refreshingly simple with the Koleos, too. It come with a choice of diesel or petrol. No, that's not a typo. Despite the British government planning for all new diesel and petrol car sales to be phased out by 2040, many manufacturers are still churning them out. You get a 1.6-litre dCi 130 with a six-speed manual gearbox and front-wheel drive. Or you can go for a 2.0-litre dCi 175, with four-wheel drive that's fitted with either a manual or seven-speed Auto X-Tronic transmission. I drove the more powerful oil-burner in auto guise – the model predicted to be the best-seller in the UK.

The Renault Koleos won't rock your world, but it's a decent

enough SUV. It looks a bit too like many other SUVs out there – most noticeably the Škoda Kodiaq, but it's an impressive car, nonetheless. I got behind the wheel of the flagship trim level – the Signature Nav, which has a generous amount of Kit, comprising big 19-inch alloy wheels, a satnav, a touchscreen and leather-bound seats. The car's infotainment system, accessed via the touchscreen is easy and self-explanatory to use, and the Renault is practical, offering cubby holes and four USB slots, for instance. What's more, the Koleos is endowed with good quality soft-touch plastics and the hide wrapping the seats and steering wheel is top-notch. There is a lower trim version, too. This is named the Dynamique S Nav and it's furnished with goodies, such as a panoramic sunroof and a rear parking camera.

The top-of-the-tree 2.0 dCi 175 AWD X-Tronic Koleos I drove really is the bee's knees, in terms of out-and-out technology and cabin refinement. The layout is well thought out for driver and passengers, and room is more than respectable. The wheelbase is the same as the X-Trail's at 2,705mm – and this equates to awesome legroom. Better still, the Koleos' load area is 29 litres bigger than the Nissan's – measuring 579 litres. Alas, take a tape measure to the similar-looking Škoda Kodiaq and the Czech-made car's boot is 630 litres. Oh well, you can't have everything. Strangely the Gallic car brand isn't providing the Koleos with a seven-seat option, though. This could be a deal-breaker as Škoda's Kodiaq does. Renault gets away with it, however,

Fast Facts

(Koleos 2.0 dCi 175 AWD X-Tronic – as tested)

Max. speed: 125mph
 0-62mph: 9.5 secs
 Combined mpg: 47.9
 Engine layout: 1995cc four-cylinder diesel turbo
 Max. power (PS): 174
 CO₂: 156g/km
 Price: £34,200

by explaining that you can always go for the Grand Scenic if you need all those seats.

On the road, the Renault Koleos is well-behaved and easy to like. Zero to 62mph arrives in 9.5 seconds and the top speed is 125mph, so the car has plenty of 'go' for motorway commutes or for overtakes on lesser roads. The Koleos has 174 horses under its ample bonnet to provide such power, and this helps tug the car along, even with five-up and a fully laden boot.

The auto 'box isn't bad, even though it's a continuously variable transmission (CVT). This means the transmission shifts through a constant range of ratios. Alas, CVTs don't always work as seamlessly as they should, resulting in a rather jerky driving experience. Nevertheless, I'm pleased to report Renault has stuck an advanced CVT into the Koleos that uses technology to copy a sequential 'box. This makes the car painless to operate.

The Koleos' ride is super comfy, with its soft suspension making you all but forget the existence of potholes. But the squidgy springs don't wreck the handling; if anything, the French SUV comes across as predictable and steady. The Koleos I drove had all-wheel-drive, so I also tested it off-road. Because the car has good ground clearance I could drive it over stones and hummocks without fear of ripping bits off the underneath of the Koleos. Furthermore, the Renault grips well in mud and anything not resembling tarmac. It's no Land Rover, but it's a great asset to have if you live in the sticks, or you plan on lugging a tin tent to a grassy caravan park or suchlike.

The Koleos is a car that is roomy and well-appointed. It also flies the luxury SUV flag for the company. This means it could attract fresh customers to the brand who are looking for an SUV with a bit of French flair. →





“It was one of the first family motors to blend 4x4 design with established hatchback efficiency.”

2017 Nissan Qashqai

The first ever Nissan Qashqai goes back a whole decade. Loads has happened since then. The iPhone wasn't invented until June 2007 and then the iPad came along in 2010. So, yes, it was a long time ago.

True, the Nissan model had an odd name, but the 'Qashqai' moniker wasn't going to stop people buying it. And that's because it was one of the first family motors to blend 4x4 design with established hatchback efficiency. This recipe speedily turned the Qashqai into a money-spinner and it sparked a new car segment, known as the 'Crossover'.

Fast-forward to now, and the popular car has been given a subtle makeover. The revised 2017 Qashqai has been given a more characteristic 'V-Motion' nose job, which is in keeping with the funky new Micra's 'face'. The Qashqai also sports redesigned front and rear daytime running lights and 19-inch alloy wheels. Additional airflow improvement comes in the shape of below the body 'vortex generators', which are meant to help the car stay planted, decrease drag and axe wind blast.

Inside, there's now more leather and tactile materials on the dashboard, centre console and doors, making everything feel classier. But, practically, not a lot has changed – and that's no bad thing. There's still enough room to keep four tall adults happy for long journeys, and a smaller fifth passenger can squash in for briefer trips. What's more, Isofix sockets on the outward areas of the rear seats make it a cinch to securely attach child seats. The Qashqai's load area is very square and can consume two large suitcases, although recent 'Crossover' competitors, the Seat

Ateca and Renault Kadjar, have more boot space.

The all-new Tekna+ leading trim, tested here, has been added by the Japanese automaker because consumers are going for cars with more kit these days. Therefore, this fresh variant comes with an eight-speaker Bose® sound system, electric heated seats, quilted leather and a panoramic glass roof. It also comes fitted with a 360-degree parking camera, pedestrian detection and rear-cross traffic alert.

Together with visual and kit revamps, the 2017 Qashqai has received several tweaks to help improve the drive. Retuned dampers and springs, as well as changes to Nissan's Active Ride Control system, aim to trim down body movement. Also, alterations to the steering rack enhances accuracy. If that's not enough, Active Return Control is a new system that's been ushered in to make the steering's 'self-centring' feel less artificial.

Indeed, the Nissan is a top choice if being comfy is your thing. Body control is acceptable and the car never feels disobedient. It sops up the horrible bangs and crashes sportier sprung cars give when cruising on our pockmarked roads. It's also a quiet car, keeping out road and wind noise effectively. Indeed, the latest Qashqai is even more hushed in the cabin than the outgoing version. This is due to different door seals and superior soundproofing.

The new Nissan Qashqai's engine line-up is the same as before, with only the 1.6-litre diesel we're reviewing here getting slight changes to heighten refinement. It's calm when warmed up, although, as with most oil-burners, if you push it past 4,000rpm it sounds agricultural from the outside. The Qashqai provides convincing pulling power and decent efficiency figures, though the more cost-effective 1.5-litre version will offer enough clout for most people. This 1.6 dCi 130 Tekna + model costs more than £30,000, however, placing it within the dominion of bigger SUVs, like the Kia Sorento. Mid-spec N-Connecta trims offer the best middle-ground between kit and cost.

So, while Nissan's endeavours to refresh the Qashqai are more wide-ranging than some other automakers' latest facelifts, nothing has been radically altered. The hike in cabin quality, design, and safety tech is pleasing, though it doesn't feel all that different to the old model when behind the wheel. Nonetheless, the Qashqai is still an economical and civilised family motor – even if more humble versions of the Crossover offer you more bang for your buck.

Fast Facts

(Qashqai 1.6 dCi 130 Tekna + – as tested)

Max. speed: 118mph
 0-62mph: 9.9 secs
 Combined mpg: 64.2
 Engine layout: 15985cc four-cylinder diesel turbo
 Max. power (PS): 130
 CO₂: 116g/km
 Price: £30,830



Volvo V90 R-Design

For those who like versatility and don't want the 'conservative' estate car image, Volvo has recently put its R-Design stamp on the V90. This means you can still drive an estate car, but one that looks hunkered down and stimulating. Yes, stimulating – who'd have thought a Volvo could have that effect?

The R-Design flavour has always given Volvos that extra something – it's made the cars spicier to look at and hotter in the way they handle. The V90 R-Design is a genuine looker – a great piece of artwork all round. Its kerbside appeal is boosted even further, thanks to its 15mm lowered ride height, silver door mirrors, gloss black grille and flashy 18-inch alloy wheels.

The jazziness continues inside, with electrically operated leather and nubuck sports seats. There are also metal-effect inlays, a vivid LED driver's display, sports pedals and illuminated tread plates.

My test car, the D5 Powerpulse AWD R-Design, came hooked up to an eight-speed automatic gearbox. This is connected to a 2.0-litre turbo diesel unit delivering 235PS – a well-judged output for regular motorway commuting. It's rapid enough for most palates, reaching 62mph in 7.2 seconds, but it is prudent, too. If you see well over 50mpg from this engine, I wouldn't be taken aback.

The V90 is refreshing compared with its rear-wheel drive German equals. In D5 guise, it has all-wheel-drive and adheres to the road like

chewing gum. The Volvo feels sprightlier, thanks to the weight of the pedals and the steering – and while this is no small vehicle, it feels far from overwhelming, due to how acquiescent it is.

Because of the R-Design's lowered, firmer suspension set-up, this V90 model will corner quickly without perceptible body lean. However, the drawback is that there's no option to alter the suspension on the fly. Mind you, air suspension can be substituted when you buy the car new, although it will cost you £1,500 for the privilege. On the regular non-R-Design V90s you are offered a more cushioned ride. But if you are determined to go for a sporty estate, and don't mind a lower, firmer system, then the stock V90 R-Design is an excellent choice. →

Fast Facts

(V90 D5 Powerpulse R-Design – as tested)

Max. speed: 149mph
 0-62mph: 7.2 secs
 Combined mpg: 57.6
 Engine layout: 1969 cc 4-cylinder twin turbo diesel
 Max. power (PS): 235
 CO₂: 129g/km
 Price: £44,865

“The R-Design flavour has always given Volvos that extra something – it's made the cars spicier to look at and hotter in the way they handle.”





All-New Renault Mégane Sport Tourer

The all new Renault Mégane Sport Tourer is a friendly car on the straights and on winding wedges of tarmac, too.

As with all estate cars, the Sport Tourer model is an ideal family motor, although there isn't as much legroom in the back as you might expect. The seats are perhaps better for the short of leg or for the children. The boot is top-notch, though, and will fit a tot's buggy and the shopping in, no problem.

Priced at £22,990 for the Dynamique S Nav dCi 110 model, tested here, Renault is bound to attract punters to this fourth generation of its 20-year-old Mégane range. Highpoints include a 1,461cc petrol-turbo power unit, which produces a decent 110PS and 260lb-ft of torque. It also comes with an easy-shifting six-speed manual gearbox.

The Renault Mégane is one of a kind when it comes to its interior touchscreen. It's the only car in its segment to house an immense portrait orientated 8.7-inch screen.

Fast Facts

(Mégane Sport Tourer

Max. speed: 116mph
 0-62mph: 11.3 secs
 Combined mpg: 76.4
 Engine layout: 1461cc 4-cylinder diesel turbo
 Max. power (PS): 110
 CO₂: 96g/km
 Price: £22,990



This is accompanied by other technology that raises the bar even higher. Equipment includes traffic sign recognition, launch control and eye-catching LED headlights.

Winding my way across some of Britain's rural routes, it became clear just how proficient the all-new Renault Mégane Sport Tourer is on corners. There's very little body lean and it's all very comfy. The amenable ride is only ever upset if you hit a particularly large rut – but then potholed roads affect the ride in any vehicle.

There are lots of things to appreciate about the all-new Renault Mégane Sport Tourer. It's a pleasurable, peppy, dexterous and relatively practical five-door estate – it's also a fine-looking set of wheels. You can't go wrong with the £22,990 price-tag either. ■



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