

LIFESTYLE

TIM BARNES-CLAY

Motoring



MIGHTY MARQUES

2019 is still young, but our motoring editor, Tim Barnes-Clay, has already been busy driving lots of different cars. So, without further ado, let's jump in and see what Tim has been behind the wheel of since the last issue.

Volvo XC60 D4 AWD R-Design Automatic

Volvo's XC60 combines decent fuel economy for a car of its size with good looks that will match its big Bavarian rivals.

Boot space is one drawback, with the XC60 only providing 1,455 litres of room (495 with the rear seats up) compared with the BMW X3, which manages 1,600/550 litres respectively.

Being a Volvo, it naturally comes packed with safety gizmos – most of them standard – and, despite being smaller than the XC90, it still manages to retain its sibling's excellent interior quality and feel.

The R-Design trim gives you the stunning sporty looks that are often difficult to achieve on SUVs. Mind you, the car's big wheels do make it less comfortable than other models, though you could claw some of that

lost comfort back with the adaptive suspension option.

Nevertheless, to drive, the XC60 still glides along nicely and drives well. It's a worthy rival to the BMW mentioned above, Audi's Q5 and Mercedes' GLC.

The four-cylinder 2.0-litre diesel-engined D4 isn't one for those who desire outright performance – 0-62mph takes 8.4 seconds, and the top speed is 127mph. However, it is also the entry-level powerplant, so there are other options available for those with a bit more to spend.

With an on-the-road price of £40,020, it's not the cheapest in its class – you could pick up a Q5 or X3 for a similar amount with comparable specs – but the Volvo is well-equipped without digging into the options list.



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Hyundai Kona Premium GT 1.6 T-GDi 4WD DCT

Hyundais are getting better all the time and, although the Kona continues this trend, it's not without its drawbacks.

Its ultra eye-catching design may not be to everyone's tastes, but you can hardly call it boring with its thin front LED headlamps and what appears to be an Audi-inspired grille.

The Audi similarities end there, though. The Kona is not in the same league. In its defence, you wouldn't expect it to be. But considering this Premium GT 1.6 T-GDi costs around £25,295, it's difficult to understand the price, which is around 50 per cent on top of the entry-level Kona's £16,750 price tag.

On the plus side, the 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol engine produces an impressive 177PS. But, as you might have feared, the extra

power comes at the expense of fuel economy: 40.4mpg will only raise eyebrows for the wrong reasons in today's eco-conscious market.

It has a small boot, too, with only 334 litres with the rear seats up (1,116 with them down) – less than the Nissan Juke, Kia Stonic, Peugeot 2008 and Renault Captur.

To drive, it's best described as 'middle of the road' – it's not as comfortable as some rivals, such as the Seat Arona, but it's hardly terrible either. The downside to the Premium GT models, though, is that they come with 18-inch alloys which do spoil the ride comfort somewhat.

Overall, the Hyundai Kona is worthy of consideration – but only because you're after a cheaper SUV. This means the Premium GT version, given its price tag, is a bit of a square peg in a round hole. →

“As you might have feared, the extra power comes at the expense of fuel economy.”





Suzuki Baleno 1.0 SZ5

Hearing the words 'Suzuki Baleno' may not fill you with excitement, but this car packs a lot of punch and has some clever tricks up its sleeve.

The five-door hatchback will appeal most to those who are looking to get from A to B comfortably and without much of a fuss. It's not as fun to drive or as good to look at as its sibling, the Swift, and don't expect the handling to be up to much.

There's a fair amount of body roll in the corners, and overall, it's

average to drive, while the interior feels like it's been made to a price.

But this is hardly a car you buy for performance, and you do get an impressive amount of kit for what is a reasonably priced car. For instance, DAB radio, Bluetooth, satnav and air conditioning come as standard.

What's more, despite only having a 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine, the SZ5 is turbocharged, which results in an impressive 112PS given its small size, while still claiming to hit 56.5mpg.

The on-the-road price, though, is £16,000 for the manual and £17,349 for the automatic – and you can get

a comparable spec Ford Fiesta or a Škoda Fabia for similar money. That may be enough to turn your head away from the Suzuki.

The boot is capacious at 355 litres – and that's more than the Swift's 265 litres, the Fiesta's 292 litres and the Fabia's 330 litres – so that's worth considering if you're carrying a lot of luggage on a regular basis.

It's roomy inside too – you'll easily fit four adults in and, while the Baleno may not win many awards for luxury or drivability, it's a decent all-rounder for the budget-conscious motorist who's fond of practicality.

“You do get an impressive amount of kit for what is a reasonably priced car.”

Ssangyong Korando ELX 4WD, auto

Ssangyong is much maligned, but its cars are true workhorses with improvements to reliability and style in recent years.

The ELX is the Korando's top-of-the-range trim and is only available with four-wheel drive, while its 2.2-litre turbodiesel engine produces 178PS. I can't help but think it might be capable of more, but with fuel economy figures of only 40.9mpg combined, it leaves you wondering if it's been tuned down to keep the mpg figure on the right side of 40.

It isn't particularly fast (0-62mph takes nearly ten seconds, and the top speed is 115mph) but it still drives reasonably well and is a decent all-rounder, though its steering lacks feel. The ride, while not uncomfortable, is hardly first-rate.

The problem is that there are many cars in its class which offer more driveability for less or similar money, such as the Peugeot 3008.

The ELX comes with larger wheels, leather seats, an electronically adjustable driver's seat, heated rear seats, as well as satnav and automatic folding mirrors. Furthermore, Ssangyong will



provide a seven-year/150,000-mile warranty.

But the ELX does cost a fiver shy of £25,000, and that's still a lot of money for a car that isn't anywhere near being the leader in its class. It's also more difficult to swallow when you realise you can get the base

model for less than £17,000.

The ELX is hard to justify, then. But bear in mind that a new Korando is due, so you could wait to see the improvements or stick with the current model and barter your way to a great price as dealers look to get rid of their existing stock.



Porsche Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid Sport Turismo

Budget-conscious people are supposed to look at hybrids, so we'd better get this out of the way first: this is a £140,000 car. Think of it as a super-estate for people who want all the power but want to protect the ice caps, too.

It's frighteningly powerful, producing 680PS and it has a 0-62mph time of just 3.4 seconds. You'll reach 124mph in only 12 seconds, and it tops out at 193mph.

Oh... and it (somehow) manages 94mpg. With a twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8. What's not to like?

If you're environmentally minded, it'll even do over 30 miles on electric power alone, enough to get you to nearly 90mph.

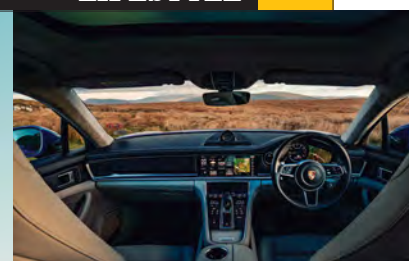
In short, it's brilliant – and that's in no small part down to all the Panamera's trickery. Its active anti-roll bars limit body roll, and it has ceramic brakes as well as torque vectoring (which sends optimum amounts of power to each wheel).

The interior is delightful, filled with futuristic screens. Furthermore, it's very refined to drive – and exceedingly comfortable, despite all that performance under the bonnet. It also has unrelenting

grip and, considering it's a big and somewhat heavy four-door estate, the Panamera Turbo S E-Hybrid Sport Turismo handles wonderfully.

In fact, the most difficult thing to handle is the price tag. Sure, if you're in the market for this sort of car and don't scoff at parting with £140,000, then that's great (you lucky devil).

But bear in mind that attaching 'eco' to the words 'performance car' usually jacks the price up significantly. Someone else can also have a brand-new Panamera for little more than half what you'll have paid: the entry-level petrol-only model is a mere 75 grand.



“Think of it as a super-estate for people who want all the power but want to protect the ice caps, too.”



Kia Ceed Sportswagon 1.6 CRDi '2'

The Ceed Sportswagon is very well-equipped, with a lovely interior, satnav, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, as well as a heated windscreen. The '2' trim (in case you're wondering what the '2' stands for) adds cruise control, 16-inch alloys and a 7-inch touchscreen to the list of standard kit.

Although it's based on the hatchback, the design doesn't look like it's merely been extended – it still has good looks, though, given some of the ultra-aggressive designs we're now used to, some may still feel the design is a bit on the conservative side.

The 1.6-litre engine produces a not unreasonable 116PS, though that's hardly sporty. In fact, although Kia prefers the term 'Sportswagon' to the



rather uninspiring 'estate', in all honesty, you'll struggle to see the sportiness at all.

Nevertheless, the car is an able contender and has an improved feel compared to Ceeds of old, though the Ford Focus Estate and the SEAT Leon ST offer estates which are better if handling is a priority. It's practical, too, with 528 litres of boot space or, with the rear seats folded away, 1,660 litres, though


that's less than the Škoda Octavia estate, which is one of its closest rivals.

It comes with a choice of a six-speed manual or a seven-speed automatic, with both hitting impressive fuel economy figures of over 60mpg. This Kia is worthy of consideration if you're willing to part with around £20,545 but, in truth, you can get a similar-sized Focus or Leon for around the same price. ■



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Tim Barnes-Clay is an experienced motoring writer with a background in radio and TV journalism. He puts his pedal to the metal each issue with his must-read car reviews. Visit carwriteups.co.uk.

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