

Meandering in the Midlands in the new Ford EcoSport

 By [Ilse van den Berg](#)

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With its newly launched EcoSport, Ford decided to properly put it to the test on a two-day travelogue from King Shaka International Airport into the wild, wonderful midlands of Natal, ending off at O.R. Tambo in Johannesburg. That's a lot of driving and that's exactly what Ford wanted us to experience.

Armed with plenty padkos, we set off - aiming to get off the main roads and onto wilder terrain as quickly as possible. In between route instructions (since we didn't have route maps), we started introducing ourselves to the rest of the travel party via our portable radios. This soon turned into a tool for random fact sharing, quirky comments and jokes throughout the journey.



The EcoSport is spacious and versatile thanks to smart storage solutions - including an adjustable boot floor. This will certainly prove handy for non-light travellers or for those hockey sticks, soccer kits, golf or grocery bags, tricycle or pram.

A welcome stop at the Piggly Wiggly in the heart of the Midlands served as a lunch stop and driver change - wood-fired pizza and much-needed coffee to fuel us for the next stretch.



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[Ilse van den Berg](#) 24 Jul 2018



On the road again, I noticed the EcoSport has some bits with a hard plastic feel which seem out of place when, at the same time, it has such stunning upgraded leather seats and lots of technology to play with.

The Sync3 infotainment system

Speaking of technology, I really do love Ford's Sync3 infotainment system which incorporates Bluetooth and voice control and can be operated with pinch and swipe gestures. A 6.5-inch screen is fitted on the Trend models, while the Titanium features an 8-inch version. I'm personally not the biggest fan of the new "floating" central touchscreen look, as it looks a little out of place sticking out of the dashboard.



Perhaps I just prefer the look of a more flat, smoothly integrated infotainment interface. But when it comes to functionality, it works like a charm once paired with your smartphone. However, we found the navigation system didn't cooperate so well with the pinching and swiping gestures.

When the road got a bit long, I was happy to have the option of cruise control with adjustable speed limiter. There are six airbags as standard on the EcoSport Ambiente, while the Trend and Titanium models also have a driver's knee airbag.

Each time I glanced in the rear-view mirror, I noticed the good looks of the new front-end design - dominated by a large trapezoidal grille and distinctive angular headlights, incorporating LED daytime running lights. With this new design, the EcoSport gleams some looks from the new Kuga and it's nice to see that family resemblance.



We passed through Moorivier and Estcourt (without picking up listeriosis, thankfully) and made our way into the mountains.

All the tech stuff

The new EcoSport is fitted with the same award-winning 1.0 EcoBoost engine as the Ford Fiesta. It delivers 92kW and 170Nm to the front wheels and performed like a champ. Climbing over rocky bits was a cinch - mainly due to its short wheelbase and the 206mm of ground clearance and active driving safety features including electronic stability control (ESC) with traction control (TC), as well as roll stability control (RSC) in the EcoBoost range, that adjusts engine torque and braking to help drivers maintain control.



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Additionally, the 1.0 EcoBoost-powered models gain hill launch assist (HLA) that makes pulling off on steep inclines easier, along with Ford's tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) which is useful for keeping an eye on tyre pressure.

Stop and Go...

Zingela River Lodge was heaven after a long day's drive. A crackling fire, a glass of wine and dinner fit for a king. The lodge offers various rustic yet luxurious accommodation options. I stayed in one of the en-suite thatched units built with mud and reed walls and traditional earth floors. A bit worried about not having any windows in the middle of winter, I happily fell asleep - curtains softly blowing about - in a snug bed (thanks to an electric blanket) to the sound of the Tugela River flowing past.

The next morning after a walk around the reserve, hoping to spot some game, we were treated to a scrumptious brekkie after which we made our way out of the mountainous area past Tugela Ferry. Lunch was at a pub and grill in Dundee and the EcoSport confidently took us up more mountains close to Vryheid (to an elevation of almost 2000m above sea level!). We came down on the other side of the mountain when it was already dark and night two was spent at the cosy country-feel Wakkerstroom Hotel.



Wakkerstroom Hotel



Ford raises the stakes in the compact car segment

Naresh Maharaj 13 Aug 2018



On the last stretch to Johannesburg the next day, it was a case of putting foot down and making sure we all caught our flights on time. When having to overtake numerous trucks, I was impressed with the Titanium's six-speed automatic gearbox. There is also a sport mode and paddle shifters mounted to the steering column to provide an additional level of control and driver engagement.

Our walkie-talkies didn't stop blabbering, throughout the day, however: "Did you know that 'Wakkerstroom' means 'lively river' in Afrikaans?" And so it went...

How many bucks?

- EcoSport 1.5 TDCi Ambiente 5MT: R264,500
- EcoSport 1.0 EcoBoost Trend 6MT: R287,500
- EcoSport 1.0 EcoBoost Trend 6AT: R300,700
- EcoSport 1.0 EcoBoost Titanium 6MT: R327,800

- EcoSport 1.0 EcoBoost Titanium 6AT: R339,900

All models come standard with Ford Protect, comprising a four-year/120,000km comprehensive warranty, three-year/unlimited distance roadside assistance and five-year/unlimited km corrosion warranty. A four-year/60,000km service plan is included, with 15,000km service intervals.

Conclusion

The EcoSport exceeded my expectations, I won't lie. Particularly on the off-road routes. With more than 45,000 EcoSport models sold in South Africa since 2013, I'm excited to see how it will perform in a tougher market as a choice in this

segment has increased substantially.

For more about Zingela Lodge, go to www.zingelasafaris.co.za. For more about Wakkerstroom Hotel, go to www.wakkerstroom.co.za.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work here and here. Contact Ilse through her website here.

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