

Smart Fortwo Coupe

WhatCar? verdict



For:

Smart owners can park where other drivers wouldn't even consider. Running costs and emissions are very low.

Against:

The ride is too firm, it's poor to drive and the entry-level Pure trim is stingily equipped.



On the road verdict

Performance



Nippy in the city, but struggles on faster roads. All Fortwos use a 999cc petrol engine, but buyers can choose from outputs of 61bhp, 71bhp, 84bhp and 98bhp. We'd go for the 71bhp model, because it's just as economical and green as the 61bhp, yet noticeably livelier in the cut and thrust of city traffic. You still need to work it hard on the motorway, though.

Ride and handling



The ride is hard and it's poor to drive. Power steering is only an option, yet without it, parking is more hassle than it should be. Then there's the ride - this tall, short-wheelbase car needs stiff suspension to stop it tottering through bends, so imperfections in the road surface are transmitted to occupants in magnified detail. The front tyres run out of grip pretty quickly, too, but it's comparable with other city cars.

Refinement



Engine becomes wearing on the motorway. The biggest disturbance comes from the three-cylinder engine, which sits just behind the seats. It emits a distinctive thrum whenever you touch the accelerator and, although the sound is far from unpleasant, it becomes tiring on long journeys. A clutchless semi-automatic gearbox is standard, but up-changes are jerky unless you ease your foot off the accelerator.

In the cabin verdict

Ownership verdict

Buying



Sips fuel, so it's very cheap to run. Very low running costs are guaranteed whichever model you choose. The Fortwo is cheap to insure, and even the most powerful engine averages 43.5mpg in town and an impressive 54.3mpg on average. On the down side, Smart salesmen are reluctant to offer discounts.

Quality



Looks classy, particularly Pulse and Passion trims. Apart from some flimsy heater controls, the interior has a solid, durable feel. Even the base Pure model looks reasonably classy inside, but the pricier Pulse and Passion trims are much smarter, thanks to fabric trim on the dash and doors. Smart's reliability record needs to improve, though.

Safety and security



Stability control welcome, but only two airbags. All Fortwos have a stability control system that helps you keep on the road in tricky conditions. Driver and passenger airbags are also standard, but it's disappointing that side airbags are only optional. An engine immobiliser means thieves will struggle to drive it away, but the absence of deadlocks diminishes the car's security. You also get charged for a lock on the glovebox.

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Behind the wheel



Logical controls, but limited adjustment
 The distinctive interior is well laid out and has big, user-friendly buttons and dials. However, some people will struggle to make themselves comfortable, because there's no seat-height adjustment and the steering wheel is fixed. If you want a brightly trimmed interior, you'll have to go for the top-trim Passion model.

Space and practicality



Only seats two, but they get plenty of space
 Practicality is limited because it has only two seats, but there's enough room for a pair of broad six-footers. Wide-opening doors mean it's easy to get in and out, and although the boot isn't massive, its 220-litre capacity compares favourably with other city cars.

Equipment



Base model is poorly kitted; top trim gets air-con
 In entry-level Pure trim, the Fortwo is poorly equipped, getting a CD player but little else. The sporty Pulse adds a rev counter, electric windows, a panoramic glass roof, alloy wheels and steering wheel-mounted gearshift paddles, while more luxury-orientated Passion cars do without the paddles in favour of a fully automatic programme for the clutchless gearbox (optional on other models) and air-conditioning.

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