

The ultimate handling test!

Cocked up wheels, opposite locks and slides aplenty; this isn't just another 'lap times' handling test, but the most objective and scientific handling test ever done. This is the real deal

Welcome to the ultimate handling test. It is the biggest, most elaborate and scientific handling test ever done! We aren't just talking lap times here, but tests that experts in the vehicle dynamics sphere recognise, recommend and use – slalom, elk and skidpad. And to inject more objectivity into the handling test (figures never lie, you see) we have the most sophisticated (and expensive) vehicle dynamic testing equipment ever used by anybody on Indian soil; the VBOX II 3-Axis system. It gives us vehicle

movement in all three planes, so gone are subjective thoughts on body roll and vehicular pitch; because with our VBOX system we now get the exact roll and pitch angle, the lateral velocity and the slip angle besides buckets load of other data. Cars that do well in the above mentioned tests are ones that will hold you in good stead in a panic situation.

But, what's a good handling car without driver involvement? So, besides the plethora of world class tests, we have also rated the cars on the fun-to-drive factor. A good fun-to-drive car needs

to have a good engine, gearbox, brakes and steering feel. It should be able to excite you. So, even though a car might slide around or oversteer sooner than others, if it returns good feedback and allows to you play with it on the limit without scaring you, it gets our vote.

We have divided the cars into two categories – cars that cost less than Rs 15 lakh and ones over Rs 15 lakh to give you a better idea of the magnitude of difference in dynamics and involvement that comes with more money, if at all.



The test track

The track for our handling test is no race track. We used Argentum Motors' sprawling facility in Greater Noida as the venue. It does not have the grippiest surface either, but it mirrors our everyday road surfaces quite closely. You can consider it as a gymkhana event wherein we used a straight and level patch of tarmac for slalom

and elk tests, and designed a technical circuit which involved low (understeer) and high speed (oversteer) corners, an S-bend, two long straights and a near constant radii loop. The total lap length is 2.3 kilometres. We put in four hot laps for each car and considered the fastest lap for all the data you see in the lap times' table.



Flying lap

We used a reasonably small start-finish straight which leads into a wide-entry left hander, where cars with better grip carried more speed, turned in earlier and got the power down sooner. C2 has a tight entry but opens up after the apex, where more powerful cars had the advantage. C3 has a tight entry and exit, where neutral handlers made up time. C4, C5 and C7 are almost identical to C3. C6 is a constant radii long loop where most cars oversteered at the exit. Post the tight left at C8, we come to C9, the fastest corner where cars with better grip and chassis balance did well.

The test equipment

The VBOX II 3-Axis system, also called the VB 20SL3, is the ace in the pack here. We are the first in the country to invest in this sophisticated system. The system features an advanced three-antenna GPS engine which allows for

simultaneous measurement of pitch, roll and slip angles from a single test setup. Thanks to careful optimisation of the GPS system, these three parameters can be measured and logged without the need for any additional sensors or equipment.

The system uses three antennas - a primary which is linked via RTK to the pitch antenna (front) and the roll antenna (side). This negates the need to have two slip angle sensors and to carry out separate tests for measuring roll, pitch and slip.



What we did

SLALOM

Slalom involves driving a car through a series of seven cones. The distance between the cones is a multiple of the car's length and therefore changes from car to car. The endeavour here was to find out how high an average speed a car can hold through the course; the higher the better. We kept upping the pace by 10kmph in every subsequent run till the car and tyres reached their limit, and at times went beyond it. The test highlights a car's stability under constant and quick direction

changes. It's a reflection of how good a car's suspension setup is, how good the tyre grip is and how communicative the chassis and steering is; because to go quicker, the car does need to instill confidence in the driver.



ELK TEST

The elk test came into being to see whether a vehicle could successfully manoeuvre around obstacles that would suddenly appear on the road, like elks or deer. We could comfortably call it the dog, cow or a pedestrian test in India because we have all sorts of beings venturing in vehicle paths here. It's a high speed test wherein the car needs to negotiate a double lane change without hitting the cones or

spinning out. And, in some cases, without toppling over. Here too the speeds were increased by 10kmph in every successive run till the car couldn't hold its line. The higher the average speed through the elk, the better.



SKIDPAD

A skidpad test which is carried out on a constant radius circle, involves driving the car around the circle at a constant speed. The speed is gradually increased by 5kmph till there's pronounced under or oversteer. Lap times around the skidpad are then recorded and the car with the least time wins. You will find that some cars take more time even though their average speed for that particular loop might be higher than a car with a quicker time. This essentially indicates higher understeering tendencies in the former.



HOT LAPS

No handling test is complete without a quick lap around a circuit. It's one test wherein every aspect of a car is put through the test - acceleration, braking, body control and tyre grip. Naturally, the quickest car around the circuit is deemed as the best for this test. But, laps also highlight aspects of a car which contribute towards making it fun-to-drive. Things like a great shifting gearbox, chassis, steering and brake feel, and even ergonomics like seat support and pedal positioning is something one appreciates immensely when trying to extract the very best from a car around a lap.



The affordable bunch: cars up to Rs 15 lakh

From the tiny Maruti Suzuki A-star to the Honda Civic, the choice in this segment is huge. And so is the difference in handling



The terms and what they mean

ROLL ANGLE The angular displacement of a vehicle about its longitudinal axis is the roll angle. In other words it is the amount of body roll the car exhibits with respect to the horizontal. The lower the value of the roll angle, the better it is.

ROLL RATE It is the ratio of the roll angle to the lateral acceleration

or gs the car experiences. The lesser the roll rate, the better. Assume two cars with identical roll angle through the slalom. The car that pulls higher gs thanks to better grip will have a lesser roll rate, and is also a better bet in dynamic terms.

PITCH ANGLE The back and forth rocking motion of a vehicle which

compresses the front suspension and extends the rear and results in the car's nose coming down and the tail rising up, is the pitch. It comes into play while braking. The action reverses when accelerating and is termed as squat. The angle the car's imaginary centre line makes with the horizontal as a result is the pitch angle. The lesser the pitch the better it is.

SLIP ANGLE In basic terms, slip angle is the difference between the direction a vehicle is travelling (known as heading) and the direction that the body of the vehicle is pointing (true heading). Also, if the slip angle of the rear tyre is greater than the slip angle of the front tyres, the vehicle is said to be oversteering. Lesser the slip angle better the grip and balance.

SPEED THROUGH SLALOM It is the maximum average speed a car can hold for the full length of the slalom run. Entry speed for each run is predefined. But, as the car negotiates the cones, the constant and quick direction changes upset its balance, and it begins to slip and slide. Only those runs were considered where the slip angle did not exceed 10 degrees.

SPEED THROUGH ELK Like in the slalom runs, the maximum average speed through a double lane change manoeuvre for all cars in this test was the deciding factor in where the cars finished in the elk test. Here again, runs which yielded more than 10 degrees of slip, were discounted and speed increments were again in 10kmph jumps.

SKIDPAD TIME It is the time taken to complete one lap of the skidpad. However, a higher average speed around the skidpad does not always mean a lesser time. Cars that tend to understeer may hold a higher average speed through the skidpad, but end up tracing a wider diameter circle, and therefore, require more time to complete the lap.

Cars with intelligent four wheel drive systems like the Quattro system of the Audi A4 and the Q7 or the 4WD of the BMW X5, which constantly keep adjusting the torque to various wheels depending on the grip on offer did extremely well here. We also found that front wheel drive vehicles did better than the two rear wheel drive BMWs we had in this handling test.

12 Maruti Suzuki A-star



Overall standing	21
Lap time	1m 54.9s
Slalom speed	73.76kmph
Elk speed	84.91kmph
Skidpad time	10.35s



The A-star takes the wooden spoon in our inaugural handling test. But, it did not come as a complete surprise - it runs skinny tyres, and even though the steering and chassis respond well, the feedback returned by both leaves a lot to be desired. Through the slalom and elk tests, a lot was left to guess work as the car along with its tyres struggled to handle the constant and sudden direction changes. It lost its footing without giving us much indication. On the skid-

pad too, the tyres let the car down. It was the slowest and generated the least lateral acceleration as well. That it only registered a roll angle of 1.7 degrees is

also an indication of its lack of grip. It did do well on the lap though. The sheer lack of pace sees it closer to the bottom, but we were impressed with its brakes.

Maruti Suzuki A-star	
Engine	998cc
Max power	66bhp@6200rpm
Max torque	90Nm@3500rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	157kmph
0-100kmph	14.8s
Price	Rs 4.06 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



11 Chevrolet Spark



Overall standing	20
Lap time	1m 55.8s
Slalom speed	75.16kmph
Elk speed	84.98kmph
Skidpad time	10.0s



The difference in average speeds between the Spark and the A-star through both elk and slalom isn't much. But, thanks to the Chevy's wider Aceleres, the grip on offer and with it, the predictability through both courses, was much bet-

ter. The low slip angle also indicates the same. However, it did record the highest roll angle on the slalom run, meaning on slender tyres, as is available on the lower spec versions of the car, the Spark would have done much worse. The Chevy was however, the worst car on the track. It has a dead steering (and one that needs a lot of input to get the car to react), a gearbox that refuses to shift properly and seats that offer no support at all. We had to pick ourselves from the floor (almost) after every corner. Brake feel and progression were poor too.

But, it does have a good chassis and suspension balance, and with a better drivetrain, not to mention better steering and brakes, it could have done better.

Chevrolet Spark	
Engine	995cc
Max power	62bhp@5400rpm
Max torque	90Nm@4200rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	152kmph
0-100kmph	15.4s
Price	Rs 3.93 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



10 Maruti Suzuki Dzire



Overall standing	19
Lap time	1m 54.4s
Slalom speed	83.36kmph
Elk speed	90.39kmph
Skidpad time	10.1s

The Dzire proved to be a mixed bag. On the hot lap, thanks to its torque spread, its exit speeds were pretty good. It also has a good gearbox. But then, the balance of the car needs serious attention. There is a lot of understeer and thanks to a relatively soft rear, lots of wallowing too. The understeering tendencies were highlighted on the skidpad. The Dzire was only quicker than its stable mate, the A-star. The saloon also reacts lazily to steering inputs. And the

steering itself needs a detailed course in communication. It's also not a car that allows too many mistakes, especially on the limit. On the more serious courses, the slalom and elk, the Dzire did better, but it still remained the worst of the sedans. We also had to work the steering quite excessively to overpower its front's sliding tendencies. The car, overall, was

Maruti Suzuki Dzire Zdi	
Engine	1248cc
Max power	75bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	190Nm@2000rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	159kmph
0-100kmph	14.4s
Price	Rs 6.66 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



pretty skittish and the low roll angles coupled with high slip angles highlight the same. Give it a stiffer suspension setup and it might just prove to be a much better handler on the limit.



9 Hyundai i20



Overall standing	17
Lap time	1m 50.7s
Slalom speed	76.40kmph
Elk speed	74.58kmph
Skidpad time	9.6s



The Hyundai i20 quite surprised us with its handling capabilities. It is a softly sprung car, and it shows in the high roll angles it registered, especially on the skidpad. But, it still managed to clock the fifth quickest time on the pad and that too in the company of some larger and more expensive cars. The skidpad performance is mainly down to its wide and grippy tyres, and the



fact that it resists understeer quite well. It also did well on the track - the turn-in is decent and it feels pretty controllable around faster corners as well. We would have liked a better gearbox nonetheless and a little more feedback from the chassis. The chassis and suspension meanwhile aren't setup to handle panic reactions. Quick direction changes had the i20 all over the place. It finished last in the elk test by a margin, and even then needed a handful of opposite lock to keep

it from spinning. It's not a really involving car to drive hard either with its focus clearly being on comfort.

Hyundai i20	
Engine	1197cc
Max power	79bhp@5200rpm
Max torque	112Nm@3000rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	155kmph
0-100kmph	12.9s
Price	Rs 5.81 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

8 Skoda Fabia



Overall standing	18
Lap time	1m 53.8s
Slalom speed	74.95kmph
Elk speed	85.68kmph
Skidpad time	9.65s

both the slalom and elk runs. It felt that the car could go faster, but when we did push on, it lost traction by the time it crossed the fourth cone and then had to back off and make some serious steering corrections. It does have the makings of a good fun-to-drive car nonetheless. It has a superb gearbox and great steering and is less prone to understeer as well, as the figures on the skidpad reveal.

The Fabia feels brilliant after the A-star, the Spark, and the i20. It has a reasonably quick and responsive steering and it doesn't need too much steering input to get it to point either way. It also has a communicative chassis. However, when pushed to the limit, the car returned poorer results than we expected. A slow lap time was expected, of course, given the lack of grunt of the diesel engine which saw the Fabia struggling to get up to speed. But, we were surprised by how soon the Skoda began to lose its footing in



Skoda Fabia TDI	
Engine	1422cc
Max power	68bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	155Nm@1600rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	160kmph
0-100kmph	14.9s
Price	Rs 7.63 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



7 Ford Ikon

Overall standing	16
Lap time	1m 52.3s
Slalom speed	83.37kmph
Elk speed	94.79kmph
Skidpad time	9.8s

Expect a Ford to bring a smile on your face every time you get behind the wheel. The Ikon is no different. It runs slender tyres so the level of grip isn't great and it is generationwise, probably the oldest car on this test. But, when it comes to the fun of driving, it can comfortably give the majority here a run for its money. Around the lap, it was oversteering almost everywhere,



but there's so much feedback and linearity in the Ikon's movements, it never scares you or leaves you wondering what might happen next. It also reacts to the driver's corrective measures almost instantly; it's like everything happens in the Ikon in slow motion. And, it has a great steering and decent brakes to compliment. The Ikon does have its shortcomings which were highlighted in the slalom and elk tests. The car rolls excessively and with limited tyre grip (also highlighted by the poor showing on the skidpad), reached

its handling limits sooner than we would have liked. It's oversteering tendencies got the better of the Ford as well.

Ford Ikon 1.3 ROCAM	
Engine	1297cc
Max power	70bhp@5500rpm
Max torque	105Nm@2500rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	148kmph
0-100kmph	14.3s
Price	Rs 4.82 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

5 Honda City

Overall standing	15
Lap time	1m 49.3s
Slalom speed	85.16kmph
Elk speed	98.55kmph
Skidpad time	9.7s

On the road, the City's handling is impressive. But when pushed to the limit, it leaves something to be desired. It has a quick steering but one that doesn't communicate very well. In the slalom and elk tests, it did worse than its competitors like the Linea and the SX4. There was too much roll and it also failed to hold its line through the course at speeds the other two man-



aged. On the skidpad, it trailed smaller cars like the Fabia and the i20. It's skinny tyres had a lot to do with its relatively poor showing on the skidpad which failed to hold back the understeer even at moderate speeds. It did well on the circuit. The City has fantastic brakes and a decent turn-in. It also allows you to adjust the line mid corner, if you do overcook it at the entry of a corner. Now, Honda chose to give us the automatic variant, and it wasn't completely a bad choice because with the pedal shifter equipped auto 'box

(which doesn't leave you waiting during downshifts) we could use the brake and throttle better around corners.

Honda City 1.5 S AT	
Engine	1497cc
Max power	116bhp@6600rpm
Max torque	146Nm@4600rpm
Gearbox	5-speed auto
Top Speed	175kmph
0-100kmph	11.9s
Price	Rs 9.04 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

6 Fiat Linea

Overall standing	14
Lap time	1m 53.2s
Slalom speed	85.75kmph
Elk speed	100.31kmph
Skidpad time	9.56s

The Fiat is quite the opposite. Its tyres offer great grip, and the body roll isn't as pronounced, which shows on the skidpad. But, the Linea's chassis feels mute in comparison, and lacks predictability. On the elk run, it felt composed at about 100kmph and felt it could handle more, comfortably. But, a 10kmph increment in entry speed had us heading in the intended direction, post a 360 degree spin and a lot slower. The dangerous bit is; the car lets go suddenly, and leaves very little

room for correction. It did better on the slalom run though, thanks mainly to the tyres. On the lap, the lack of power was immediately evident, especially exiting the slower corners. The Fiat also isn't a great fun-to-drive car; the gearbox isn't fantastic to use and neither is the steering for that matter. Also, the front seats slope forward which made it difficult to stay in place under hard braking.



Fiat Linea 1.4 FIRE	
Engine	1368cc
Max power	90bhp@6000rpm
Max torque	115Nm@1900rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	165kmph
0-100kmph	14.2s
Price	Rs 7.13 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

4 Maruti Suzuki SX4

Overall standing	13
Lap time	1m 49.7s
Slalom speed	87.52kmph
Elk speed	99.16kmph
Skidpad time	9.58s

We weren't expecting the SX4 to finish this high. Sure, it has hugely wide tyres, but it's also a tall car. The wide tyres ensured a good run around the skidpad with the SX4 taking just a 10th of a second more than the Corolla, which was the top finisher on the skidpad. It did however record a higher average speed through the course indicating higher understeering tendencies. On the slalom and elk courses, it registered high roll angles with just three cars recording higher angles than this Suzuki. But, it has a stiff chassis;

one that responds well to driver inputs, and lots of grip too. We experienced the same on the lap as well. However, it could do better in terms of driver involvement. We weren't impressed with the car's feedback at all - the steering feels artificial and lacks progressive feedback. The chassis too isn't very communicative, and so, one tends to hold back for the lack of confidence. It does have a good shifting gearbox nonetheless.



Maruti Suzuki SX4	
Engine	1586cc
Max power	102bhp@5500rpm
Max torque	145Nm@4200rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	178kmph
0-100kmph	11.5s
Price	Rs 7.13 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

3 Honda Civic

Overall standing	12
Lap time	1m 48.4s
Slalom speed	89.56kmph
Elk speed	101.03kmph
Skidpad time	9.75s

In fact, it failed to complete a single run at this speed without its tail sliding all over the place. A better suspension setup to reign in its body movements would certainly have helped clocking higher average speeds through the course. On the lap though, it did well. The Civic has a quick steering, good brakes and a sharp turn-in to boot. It registered the highest top speed too, but thanks to a tall second gear, it struggled to get up to pace exiting tight corners. Around faster bends it showed an affinity for oversteer mainly on account of the front end digging in, and the rear failing to stay in touch with tarmac courtesy pronounced wallowing. Even so, it never felt scary or out of control.



The 1.8-litre engine is free revving nature and has decent poke too



Civic's quick steering is one of its strong attributes. It's also great to hold

Honda Civic 1.8 V AT	
Engine	1799cc
Max power	132bhp@5800rpm
Max torque	170Nm@4200rpm
Gearbox	5-speed auto
Top Speed	185kmph
0-100kmph	11.5s
Price	Rs 13.1 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



SLALOM RESULTS

Points	Car	Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Max pitch angle (degrees)	Max slip angle (degrees)	Max lateral velocity (kmph)
12	Fiesta	91.48	4.49	2.29	2.75	4.43
11	Corolla Altis	90.96	5.35	2.47	4.54	7.15
10	Civic	89.56	4.91	0.97	3.44	5.24
9	SX4	87.52	5.79	0.52	6.43	10.53
8	Linea	85.75	5.75	1.96	7.42	11.67
7	City	85.16	4.24	1.07	5.11	7.81
6	Ikon	83.37	6.04	0.97	4.28	6.35
5	Dzire	83.36	3.73	0.93	5.2	7.63
4	i20	76.4	5.46	0.76	7.57	10.12
3	Spark	75.16	6.3	2.39	3.15	4.18
2	Fabia	74.95	3.94	1.82	3.29	4.22
1	A-star	73.76	6.08	1.73	5.23	6.68

Fiesta not only recorded the quickest speed through the slalom, but it did so with utmost composure. Even on runs with slip angles exceeding 10 degrees, it felt very much in control. The likes of the Fabia, Spark and Civic reach the slip threshold quite abruptly, which is why these record lower slip angles

ELK TEST RESULTS

Points	Car	Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Max pitch angle (degrees)	Max slip angle (degrees)	Max lateral velocity (kmph)
12	Fiesta	101.45	4.7	0.59	1.85	3.26
11	Corolla Altis	101.32	4.88	0.58	2.87	4.35
10	Civic	101.03	5.08	0.34	1.45	2.56
9	Linea	100.31	6.24	0.74	5.02	8.74
8	SX4	99.16	6.65	0.11	5.75	9.9
7	City	98.55	6.21	0.35	4.43	7.44
6	Ikon	94.79	5.45	0.89	2.69	4.51
5	Dzire	90.39	3.19	0.52	2.01	3.15
4	Fabia	85.68	7.09	0.13	4.51	6.58
3	Spark	84.98	4.01	0.42	4.24	6.03
2	A-star	84.91	3.69	0.35	4.23	6.88
1	i20	74.58	3.93	0.14	6.68	9.3

Cars with a good chassis and suspension setup not to mention grippy tyres generally do well in an elk test. Fiesta has all these attributes and therefore it is on the top of the charts. The Linea too did well initially thanks to its tyres, but it's chassis lacks feedback and linearity in movement, which catches you by surprise

SKIDPAD RESULTS

Points	Car	Time(s)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Lateral Gs (degrees/g)	Roll rate skidpad (kmph)	Avg speed through skidpad (kmph)
12	Corolla Altis	9.45	1.71	0.71	2.41	39.17
11	Fiesta	9.52	1.71	0.73	2.34	39.81
10	Linea	9.56	4.25	0.69	6.16	39.79
9	SX4	9.58	4.35	0.61	7.13	39.36
8	i20	9.6	5.22	0.72	7.25	39.65
7	Fabia	9.65	2.17	0.7	3.10	38.12
6	City	9.7	2.94	0.68	4.32	37.79
5	Civic	9.75	4.26	0.7	6.09	39.43
4	Ikon	9.8	4.01	0.67	5.99	37.35
3	Spark	10	2.09	0.64	3.27	36.3
2	Dzire	10.1	2.72	0.63	4.32	35.91
1	A-star	10.35	1.74	0.6	2.90	35.27

The Altis on account of its tyres and well reigned in steady state roll did well here. On the other end of the spectrum was the narrow tyred A-Star which struggled to keep understeer in check. It did well till the speeds were below 30kmph, but then on, it just kept tracing a wider and wider circle

2 Toyota Corolla Altis

Overall standing	10
Lap time	1m 47.7s
Slalom speed	90.96kmph
Elk speed	101.32kmph
Skidpad time	9.45s

The Altis, as the results reveal, is a very competent car indeed, in handling terms. It's a tough task unsettling it. Through the slalom and elk runs it maintained its composure beautifully and only when the speeds were beyond the ton mark did it begin to slide a bit. But, again, there was no real drama to talk about. It also felt the most neutral handling car of the lot. It has good tyres (it did finish at the top on the skidpad), a sharp steering, and a chassis and suspension setup that can take some abuse and still be forgiving in nature. Like its competitor, the Civic, the Altis too was an automatic, but its gearing suited our track better. It also offered more grip over undulated surfaces and body control - roll and pitch, were well within acceptable



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Toyota Corolla Altis Auto	
Engine	1794cc
Max power	132bhp@6000rpm
Max torque	179Nm@4200rpm
Gearbox	4-speed auto
Top Speed	175kmph
0-100kmph	12.0s
Price	Rs 13.1 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



The mute steering robs the Altis of its fun-to-drive factor



The Toyota engine's torque spread sees it pull well out of corners

limits. The best bit about the Corolla is the predictability of its setup - it will never turn around and bite you and that alone instills a lot of confidence in the driver to push hard. To add, its brakes bite well and the progression is near seamless. To put it simply, it's easy to drive the Corolla hard. However, its biggest weakness is its uninvolved nature. It's a little cold for our tastes, especially the mute steering which just doesn't let you in on the action.



Ford Fiesta



Overall standing	7
Lap time	1m 46.7s
Slalom speed	91.48kmph
Elk speed	101.45kmph
Skidpad time	9.52s

■ The Fiesta is our champion in the affordable bunch. And deservedly so: it is the most fun-to-drive car in this group with a precise and short throw gearbox, a quick and talkative steering, and a nice sounding and easy revving engine. It also has the most sorted chassis and suspension combo for a good handling car. On the lap we were completely taken by surprise by the car's turn-in abilities. While the others, including the Corolla, showed turn-in understeer followed by oversteer through the fast but less grippy corners, the Ford just gripped and gripped and traced a line through bends we never thought possible. A good indication of the same is its lap time, which is a second quicker than the next quickest car, the Altis. Its slower top speed but a higher apex speed through C9 further highlights this fact. The only inadequacy of sorts

Epecially engineered

Compared to the other Fiesta variants, it gets a remapped ECU, quicker steering and stiffer springs. The results of the quicker steering were evident through the lap, as were the benefits of stiffer and lower springs. The 1.6S also gets special 15-inch tyres from Goodyear. According to Ford, these tailor made tyres are grippier and complement it exceedingly well. The sharp turn-in for instance is the obvious advantage and given the car's overall performance, we don't doubt it, one bit.



No matter what course we put the Fiesta through, it just exceeded our expectations, courtesy a good chassis and suspension combo and grippy tyres. To boot, it has a sharp and talkative steering (left) and a quick shifting gearbox



were the brakes. These bite well, no doubt, but lack progression and feel. Even on the more technical course like slalom and elk, it required some effort to get the car over its limits. And when we did get there, it required no real heroics to get it back in line. It has fantastically grippy tyres and it handles the quick and constant direction changes with some authority. In the slalom run, it registered the highest average speed and the lowest slip angle which tells you how composed the Fiesta was through the run.



Ford Fiesta 1.6 S	
Engine	1596cc
Max power	101bhp@6500rpm
Max torque	146Nm@3400rpm
Gearbox	5-speed manual
Top Speed	173kmph
0-100kmph	11.7s
Price	Rs 7.13 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

OVERALL FINAL RANKING - THE AFFORDABLE BUNCH

	Fiesta	Corolla Altis	Civic	Sx4	City	Linea	Ikon	Fabia	i20	Dzire	Spark	A-Star
Slalom	12	11	10	8	9	5	6	4	7	3	1	2
Elk	12	11	10	9	7	8	6	2	4	5	3	1
Skidpad	12	11	10	8	7	9	6	4	1	5	3	2
Lap times	11	12	5	9	6	10	4	7	8	2	3	1
Fun factor	12	8	11	10	9	6	5	7	4	3	1	2
Overall	59	53	46	44	38	38	27	24	24	18	11	8
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

Since there are 12 cars in the Affordable Bunch, we gave a maximum of 12 points to the top finisher in each test with the following cars getting 11, 10, 9 etc. At the end we added the points garnered by each car to come to a final points tally. The car with the maximum points won; in this case it is the Fiesta

The expensive collection: cars over Rs 15 lakh

Moving up the socio-economic chain also means there's more firepower under the hoods and stability control technologies



9 Honda CR-V



Overall standing	11
Lap time	1m 47.1s
Slalom speed	89.57kmph
Elk speed	96.51kmph
Skidpad time	9.62s

■ Ideally, we would have liked the 2.4 CR-V. It is one of the better handling SUVs thanks to all wheel drive. And that it has a bigger, more powerful engine would have helped its cause in the lap times. Unfortunately, Honda only had the front wheel driven 2.0 available at the time for us. And it finishes at the bottom of the expensive collection. The CR-V has a lot going for it - a sharp steering with reasonable feedback, good brakes, good turn-in, a short throw and precise manual gearbox and a stiff setup that keeps body movements well in check. And it showed on the lap wherein the SUV finished above its stable mate, the Accord. The AWD would have done much better, especially around slower cor-

ners where the 2-litre just kept spinning its inside front wheel at exits failing to put the power down. However, through the slalom and elk, the CR-V did disappoint us. We had two spins as the Honda just couldn't cope up with quick direction changes. No wonder it finished at the bottom in both tests.

i	Honda CR-V 2.0
Engine	1997cc
Max power	143bhp@6000rpm
Max torque	190Nm@4200rpm
Gearbox	6-speed manual
Top Speed	180kmph
0-100kmph	11.3s
Price	Rs 21.4 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi



8 Honda Accord



Overall standing	9
Lap time	1m 48.9s
Slalom speed	100.66kmph
Elk speed	109.01kmph
Skidpad time	9.47s

■ Like the City and the Civic, the Accord's body movements, at first glance, seem far from being well administered. And therefore, its good performance in the slalom and elk test came as a surprise, especially after the CR-V had done

so poorly. The Accord was more planted and unlike the CR-V which exhibited snap oversteer through the course, on the Accord, the rear's tendency to overtake the front was more gradual, and therefore, more controllable. It did not record sig-

i	Honda Accord 2.4 Auto
Engine	2354cc
Max power	180bhp@6500rpm
Max torque	222Nm@4300rpm
Gearbox	5-speed auto
Top Speed	210kmph
0-100kmph	10.8s
Price	Rs 18.4 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

nificantly high roll or pitch angles either. But, on the hot lap, it struggled to maintain its composure as well its speeds through the corners, particularly through the high-speed ones. Like the Civic, we had to battle some oversteer through the faster bends along with the car's refusal to turn-in quickly through the slower corners.



7 Volkswagen Jetta

Overall standing	8
Lap time	1m 47.9s
Slalom speed	90.17kmph
Elk speed	104.89kmph
Skidpad time	9.2s

■ We would have liked the Jetta to go up against the likes of the Civic and Corolla. But, as the only variant available was the DSG equipped diesel, it finds itself amongst some serious competition. It is the worst of the Germans in this group, and gets left behind significantly in most tests apart from the skidpad. It finished third on the pad highlighting its ability to do well under steady state cornering. Having grippy tyres also helped the VW's cause here. But, when it comes to sudden direction changes coupled with slight variability in speed, it is left wanting. It finished

second from bottom in the slalom and third last in the elk test. The Jetta didn't do too well on the lap either. It has a good steering, and it also showed neutral behaviour through most corners. It's reasonably high apex speed through C9 shows it. But, its engine lacks poke. And when revved hard, it sounds strained. It also recorded the slowest top speed.



Volkswagen Jetta 1.9 TDI	
Engine	1896cc
Max power	105bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	250Nm@1900rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	180.8kmph
0-100kmph	12.2s
Price	Rs 16.8 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

6 BMW 5-series

Overall standing	6
Lap time	1m 44.3s
Slalom speed	98.79kmph
Elk speed	109.09kmph
Skidpad time	9.64s

■ Maybe it's a rear wheel drive thing or the way the weight distribution works on BMW sedans, but it's surprising how the 5-series finished lower than we expected, thanks to an average performance through slalom and elk. It did however do better than the 3 on both counts and like the latter, did well on the hot lap too. But, its power comes in like a burst which gets the rear wheels spinning away frantically. As we drove the laps with the stability program switched on, the 5 was losing precious time battling its system

cutting power through most corners. The quickest time we managed on the 5 though, was with a gentle throttle and



BMW 530i	
Engine	2996cc
Max power	258bhp@6500rpm
Max torque	300Nm@2400rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	225kmph
0-100kmph	7.6s
Price	Rs 45.9 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

trying our best not to wake up the stability program. The system also played spoilsport on the skidpad for the 5.

5 BMW 3-series

Overall standing	5
Lap time	1m 43.1s
Slalom speed	93.39kmph
Elk speed	102.25kmph
Skidpad time	9.23s

■ Honestly, we were expecting the 3-series to finish much higher. It is after all a BMW, and one that has huge driver and performance focus. And it did not let us down on the hot laps, finishing second, ahead of even its more powerful elder sibling, the 5-series. It also scores for its fun-to-drive factor. It has sharp turn-in, great brakes and a fun to use steering as well.

It also holds good corner speeds, mainly through the quicker sections, and thanks to its low end grunt, ex-its slower ones with utmost potency. However, in the slalom and elk tests,



BMW 320d	
Engine	1995cc
Max power	177bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	350Nm@1750rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	215kmph
0-100kmph	8.5s
Price	Rs 30.5 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

it felt like a completely different car; one that was struggling to keep up with the rapid direction changes. The fastest entry speed we managed in the slalom test was only 100kmph, and even then, had to back off by the third cone to avoid a slide. It was worse off through the elk, with the car failing to carry even 110kmph through the course.

4 BMW X5

Overall standing	4
Lap time	1m 45.5s
Slalom speed	103.45kmph
Elk speed	109.38kmph
Skidpad time	9.25s

■ Yes, it's true - BMW's SUV did manage to outdo its saloon siblings. And it did so courtesy its intelligent four wheel drive system. It was slower on the lap, of course; with all that weight and bulk it couldn't match the sedans' acceleration prowess or their sharp turn-in. But even so, it's still a fantastic vehicle to lap in. It's an unconventional feeling to begin with - you sit high, know in the back of your mind that it's a mammoth you are piloting, but after a gingerly first lap, you begin realising its potential. And when you push hard, it obliges. The X5 also did



BMW X5 3.0d	
Engine	2993cc
Max power	218bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	480Nm@2000rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	202kmph
0-100kmph	9.1s
Price	Rs 62.5 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

much better in both the slalom and elk tests. It finished above the 5-series in the latter and did so with far less drama or tail out moments. Through the slalom, it emerged as the third best vehicle in this group registering higher average speeds than even its immediate competition, the Q7, while maintaining its body composure beautifully.

SLALOM RESULTS						
Points	Car	Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Max pitch angle (degrees)	Max slip angle (degrees)	Max lateral velocity (kmph)
9	A4	114.26	4.6	5.98	0.58	11.81
8	Passat	104.29	5.25	5.36	0.68	8.19
7	X5	103.45	3.19	5.46	0.7	9.92
6	Accord	100.66	5.59	4.51	0.93	7.66
5	530i	98.79	5.29	3.66	2.49	5.97
4	Q7	98.12	4.88	4.89	1.08	8.64
3	320d	93.39	6.44	6.03	1.13	9.95
2	Jetta	90.17	5.67	5.62	1.57	9
1	CR-V	89.57	6.3	5.55	0.92	8.31


The A4 with its four wheel drive system, nicely balanced chassis and the suspension set on sport mode left every other car feeling incompetent, and by a margin. It went quicker than 114.26kmph through the course without spinning out but registered a slip angle of over 10 degrees and therefore that run was discounted

ELK TEST RESULTS						
Points	Car	Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Max pitch angle (degrees)	Max slip angle (degrees)	Max lateral velocity (kmph)
9	A4	126.28	4.86	2.74	0.13	6.12
8	Passat	112.27	4.63	2.48	0.52	5.08
7	Q7	112.2	3.85	2.24	0.83	6.5
6	X5	109.38	3.73	2.51	0.7	4.84
5	530i	109.09	5.65	3.47	0.93	6.39
4	Accord	109.01	5.38	2.97	0.66	5.89
3	Jetta	104.89	6.47	5.83	0.22	9.81
2	320d	102.25	5.52	4.19	1	7.5
1	CR-V	96.51	4.65	2.53	0.31	4.26

Here again the A4 makes the others look silly. The surprise here however was the Q7. It's a heavy vehicle, but it also grips phenomenally well. If you look closely all three four-wheel-drive vehicles have done well here compared to the RWD Bimmers which were struggling with their stability program kicking in too soon

SKIDPAD RESULTS						
Points	Car	Time(s)	Max roll angle (degrees)	Lateral Gs (degrees/g)	Roll rate skidpad	Avg speed through skidpad (kmph)
9	A4	9.05	2.93	0.82	3.57	42.03
8	Q7	9.12	4.9	0.81	6.05	41.77
7	Jetta	9.2	3.81	0.78	4.88	40.87
6	Passat	9.21	4.25	0.8	5.31	41.61
5	320d	9.23	4.73	0.79	5.99	40.85
4	X5	9.25	2.52	0.79	3.19	41.57
3	Accord	9.47	4.06	0.78	5.21	40.87
2	CR-V	9.62	3.54	0.74	4.78	39.73
1	530i	9.64	4.73	0.73	6.48	40.04

The 530i suffered on the skidpad on account of its strict stability program. Past 35kmph, the program was constantly kicking in, spoiling the balance as well as the speed of the car. The 320d fared better, the CR-V struggled and among the VW sisters, the Jetta very slightly managed to beat the Passat on time



Our sincere thanks to the folks at ARGENTUM MOTORS without whom we could never have completed this test successfully. We used the company's sprawling facility, its test tracks and other well kept amenities throughout the course of the handling test. Thank you sirs.

1

3 Audi Q7

Overall standing 3

Lap time 1m 44.8s
 Slalom speed 98.12kmph
 Elk speed 112.20kmph
 Skidpad time 9.12s



However, it's the Q7 that emerges as the better handler overall than the X5 in our test. This one too comes as a surprise; we are, after all, talking about the largest SUV you can buy in the country today, and one that weighs almost two tons. The weight did raise its ugly head during the laps. The Q7, even though it managed a quicker time compared to the X5 thanks to its



Quattro working better in this setting, felt laborious to drive. The turn-in was lazier and its brakes witnessed so much fade in two laps that we had to abandon the third lap because the brakes could not cut enough speed for us to make a corner! The Audi did well in the elk test managing an average speed less than the A4 and a little less than the Passat. It did however register lower roll and slip angles than the VW. But during the slalom, its bulk probably kept adding up with direction change after direction change and towards the

Audi Q7 3.0 TDI

Engine	2967cc
Max power	240bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	550Nm@2000rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	203kmph
0-100kmph	10.0s
Price	Rs 66.7 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

2 Volkswagen Passat

Overall standing 2

Lap time 1m 47.4s
 Slalom speed 104.29kmph
 Elk speed 112.27kmph
 Skidpad time 9.21s



We all know the Passat handles well. But that it would beat the Bimmers in a handling test, wasn't part of the script. Given its lack of power compared to the competition, it naturally didn't do well on the hot lap finishing third from bottom. But, even on the lap we could see signs of brilliance; the sharp turn-in, steering precision and feedback and the balance through corners were excellent. There was perceptible roll through quicker corners, but never enough to worry you. On the more demanding slalom run it shone -



VW Passat 2.0 TDi

Engine	1968cc
Max power	140bhp@4000rpm
Max torque	320Nm@2500rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	206kmph
0-100kmph	11.1s
Price	Rs 24.5 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

Audi A4 3.2 Quattro

Overall standing 1

Lap time 1m 37.9s
 Slalom speed 114.26kmph
 Elk speed 126.28kmph
 Skidpad time 9.05s

Our overall champion, the A4 3.2 Quattro, is the best handling car one can buy in the country. It's simply brilliant! We were taken aback by the Fiesta's prowess, but the A4 is on a different plane altogether. To begin with, it has so much grip; it requires a gifted individual to get it to misbehave. Then, of course, there's the chassis and suspension setup, and not to mention the superb steering and feedback coming in from all quarters.

A5 DNA helps
 The A4 borrows heavily from its sportier cousin, the A5. Compared to the old A4, the new one uses a lighter and stiffer shell. Also, the front axle has been moved forward so that the engine sits behind the axle giving it better weight distribution. In addition to all this it also gets a new dynamic suspension with a five-link layout at the front for better control of the lateral and longitudinal movements of the car's wheels, and the end result is as close to neutral steer as possible.

Through the slalom run, we'd generally begin at 80kmph. But, on the A4 it felt like crawling speed. And instead of going upto 90kmph, we bumped up the speed by 20kmph. Even at 100kmph it felt like a lazy Sunday morning drive. It managed 110kmph without so much as breaking sweat. Finally, at an entry speed of 120kmph did the A4's invincibility falter. It was the same through elk; it managed more

than 10kmph higher speed through the course compared to the second best car, and that, at speeds of over 110kmph, is a colossal achievement.

Audi A4 3.2 Quattro

Engine	3197cc
Max power	265bhp@6500rpm
Max torque	330Nm@3000rpm
Gearbox	6-speed auto
Top Speed	250kmph
0-100kmph	7.4s
Price	Rs 37.0 lakh, ex-showroom, Delhi

All wheel drive meant, it did exceptionally well on the skidpad too, pulling the highest gs through the course and recording the lowest roll rate as well. On the lap, with over 250bhp, outstanding grip and intuitiveness of the setup including the chassis and steering which feels like an extension of your mind, it completely annihilated every other car in this test.



The A4 is simply beyond compare in this bunch; be it straightline stability, high and low speed cornering ability or its braking prowess. It also has a monster of an engine under the hood (left) one that develops over 250bhp and propels the car forward with ferocity



OVERALL FINAL RANKING - THE EXPENSIVE COLLECTION

	A4	Passat	Q7	X5	320d	530i	Jetta	Accord	CR-V
Slalom	9	8	4	7	3	5	2	6	1
Elk	9	8	7	6	2	5	3	4	1
Skidpad	9	6	8	4	5	1	7	3	2
Lap times	9	3	6	5	8	7	2	1	4
Fun factor	9	7	4	5	8	6	2	1	3
Overall Ranking	45	32	29	27	26	24	16	15	11
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

In the Expensive Collection, we had nine cars. So, we gave a maximum of 9 points to the top finisher in each test with the following cars getting 8, 7, 6 etc. At the end we added the points garnered by each car to come to a final points tally. The car with the maximum points won; in this case it is the Audi A4



	A4	Passat	Q7	X5	320d	530i	Fiesta	Jetta	Accord	Corolla Altis	CR-V	Civic	SX4	Linea	City	Ikon	i20	Fabia	Dzire	Spark	A-star
SLALOM																					
Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	114.26	104.29	98.12	103.45	93.39	98.79	91.48	90.17	100.66	90.96	89.57	89.56	87.52	85.75	85.16	83.37	76.4	74.95	83.36	75.16	73.76
Max roll angle (degrees)	4.6	5.25	4.88	3.19	6.44	5.29	4.49	5.67	5.59	5.35	6.3	4.91	5.79	5.75	4.24	6.04	5.46	3.94	3.73	6.3	6.08
Max pitch angle (degrees)	0.58	0.68	1.08	0.70	1.14	2.49	2.29	1.57	0.93	2.47	0.92	0.97	0.52	1.96	1.07	0.97	0.76	1.82	0.93	2.39	1.73
Max slip angle (degrees)	5.98	5.36	4.89	5.46	6.03	3.66	2.75	5.62	4.51	4.54	5.55	3.44	6.43	7.42	5.11	4.28	7.57	3.29	5.2	3.15	5.23
Max Lateral velocity (kmph)	11.81	8.19	8.64	9.92	9.95	5.97	4.43	9	7.66	7.15	8.31	5.24	10.53	11.67	7.81	6.35	10.12	4.22	7.63	4.18	6.68
Points	21	20	16	19	15	17	14	12	18	13	11	10	9	8	7	6	4	2	5	3	1
ELK																					
Avg speed through slalom (kmph)	126.28	112.27	112.2	109.38	102.25	109.09	101.45	104.89	109.01	101.32	96.51	101.03	99.16	100.31	98.55	94.79	74.58	85.68	90.39	84.98	84.91
Max roll angle (degrees)	4.86	4.63	3.85	3.73	5.52	5.65	4.7	6.47	5.38	4.88	4.65	5.08	6.65	6.24	6.21	5.45	3.93	7.09	3.19	4.01	3.69
Max pitch angle (degrees)	0.13	0.52	0.83	0.7	1	0.93	0.59	0.22	0.66	0.58	0.31	0.34	0.11	0.74	0.35	0.89	0.14	0.13	0.52	0.42	0.35
Max slip angle (degrees)	2.74	2.48	2.24	2.51	4.19	3.47	1.85	5.83	2.97	2.87	2.53	1.45	5.75	5.02	4.43	2.69	6.68	4.51	2.01	4.24	4.23
Max Lateral velocity (kmph)	6.12	5.08	6.5	4.84	7.5	6.39	3.26	9.81	5.89	4.35	4.26	2.56	9.9	8.74	7.44	4.51	9.3	6.58	3.15	6.03	6.88
Points	21	20	19	18	14	17	13	15	16	12	7	11	9	10	8	6	1	4	5	3	2
SKIDPAD																					
Time(s)	9.05	9.21	9.12	9.25	9.23	9.64	9.52	9.2	9.47	9.45	9.62	9.75	9.58	9.56	9.7	9.8	9.6	9.65	10.1	10	10.35
Max roll angle (Degrees)	2.93	4.25	4.9	2.52	4.73	4.73	1.71	3.81	4.06	1.71	3.54	4.26	4.35	4.25	2.94	4.01	5.22	2.17	2.72	2.09	1.74
Lateral Gs	0.82	0.8	0.81	0.79	0.79	0.73	0.73	0.78	0.78	0.71	0.74	0.7	0.61	0.69	0.68	0.67	0.72	0.7	0.63	0.64	0.6
Roll rate skidpad (Degrees/g)	3.57	5.31	6.05	3.19	5.99	6.48	2.34	4.88	5.21	2.41	4.78	6.09	7.13	6.16	4.32	5.99	7.25	3.10	4.32	3.27	2.90
Avg speed through skidpad (kmph)	42.03	41.61	41.77	41.57	40.85	40.04	39.81	40.87	40.87	39.17	39.73	39.43	39.36	39.79	37.79	37.35	39.65	38.12	35.91	36.3	35.27
Points	21	18	20	16	17	8	13	19	14	15	9	5	11	12	6	4	10	7	2	3	1
LAP TIMES																					
Time (min:sec)	01:37.9	01:47.4	01:44.8	01:45.5	01:43.1	01:44.3	01:46.7	01:47.9	01:48.9	01:47.7	01:47.1	01:48.4	01:49.7	01:53.2	01:49.3	01:52.3	01:50.7	01:53.8	01:54.4	01:55.8	01:54.9
Max lateral gs at C9	0.98	0.77	0.74	0.79	0.76	0.78	0.8	0.61	0.74	0.83	0.93	0.82	0.76	0.71	0.78	0.67	0.67	0.58	0.63	0.54	0.75
Vmax	151.25	126.63	133.01	133.19	137.69	142.14	125.62	121.37	130.8	127.21	128.86	128.71	124.85	117.66	125.59	115.68	114.68	114	113.41	112.28	116.12
Apex speed at C9 (kmph)	79.82	72.91	75.1	72.18	78.18	76.51	73.03	76.21	70.98	72.81	76.32	69.81	71.77	70.99	71.41	64.59	70.24	66.25	67.23	69.07	67.5
Points	21	14	18	17	20	19	16	12	10	13	15	11	8	5	9	6	7	4	3	1	2
FINAL RANKING -OVERALL																					
Slalom	21	20	16	19	15	17	14	12	18	13	11	10	9	8	7	6	4	2	5	3	1
Elk	21	20	19	18	14	17	13	15	16	12	7	11	9	10	8	6	1	4	5	3	2
Skidpad	21	18	20	16	17	8	13	19	14	15	9	5	11	12	6	4	10	7	2	3	1
Lap times	21	14	18	17	20	19	16	12	10	13	15	11	8	5	9	6	7	4	3	1	2
Fun factor	21	18	15	16	19	17	20	12	9	8	14	13	11	6	10	5	4	7	3	1	2
Overall	105	90	88	86	85	78	76	70	67	61	56	50	48	41	40	27	26	24	18	11	8
RANKING	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21

SLALOM

The CR-V along with the Linea were two cars that exhibited snap oversteer during slalom. Both cars felt stable on one run and with a 10kmph higher entry speed couldn't even get to the end without spinning.

ELK

The worst cars on this course were the i20 and the A-star. The A-Star suffered courtesy its thin tyres while the i20 quite surprised us with its dismal performance. It does after all run comparatively fatter tyres than the Maruti.

SKIDPAD

The A-Star and the Dzire were the worst two cars on the skidpad. The A-Star suffered for the lack of grip, but the Dzire runs significantly wider rubber. It was its understeering tendencies that got the better of it.

LAP TIMES

The Spark is a good handling car among small hatches. But, it's comparatively poor brakes and a far from eager drivetrain saw it record the slowest time. The A-Star managed to beat it thanks mainly to its braking prowess.



Verdict

■ The A4 is our overall winner. And it outscores every other car in this test in every test. Brilliant! It's also a superb fun-to-drive car. The A4 is extremely well endowed and to get to its limits requires some effort. But, even if you don't it'll still give you the goose bumps and set your heart racing like no other car.

The Fiesta in comparison isn't as dynamically great. But even then, it gets our vote for being a fabulously involving car to drive. You can get to its limits early, but even then, if won't scare you; it'll just indulge you till you have had enough. The 3-series is our third best fun-to-drive car. It is

rear wheel driven, torque and with a steering that's as chatty as a stand up comedian. We loved it on the laps, and enjoyed it during the elk and the slalom runs too. And if it weren't for its strict stability program, it just might have done a tad better.

Vikrant Singh

