



Look for oil leaks underneath – the sump (oil pan) could be dripping.

tensioner, which could be about to crack (60,000 miles is common); worry if the black plastic is tinged blue.

Oil leaks beneath the car most likely emanate from the camshaft position sensor, found at the back of the cylinder head; heat distorts the seals and oil drips between the engine and gearbox – eventually seeping out of the gearbox.

Head gasket failure is possible, if rare, as are cracks in the cylinder head around the spark plugs. They tend not to cause issues, so it's unlikely you'll see evidence on a pre-purchase inspection.

Cooling system

4 3 2 1

Coolant leaks are common to ST and RS, although the latter causes more concern – and cost. Both are prone to leaks from O-rings on the thermostat housing or cracks in the body, leaving rusty water stains or drips down the bellhousing. The fix is a good-quality new housing or – better still – a billet alloy upgrade.



Coolant leaks are common, so check the fluid levels and examine the hoses.

Note that some STs (especially those that are for track use) have been modified with uprated gear sets (early BMW Mini Cooper Ss use the same gearbox) or a five-speed conversion using the MTX75 from a regular 2-litre Focus; when coupled to a single-mass flywheel, it's said to be a revelation.

Transmission (RS)

4 3 2 1

The RS retained a normal-type Ford five-speed manual (MTX75) transmission, albeit with serious upgrades – revised ratios, stronger shot-peened cogs, Quaife Automatic Torque-Biasing (ATB) differential, and beefier driveshafts.

The MTX75 is man enough for almost any abuse (or power increases), although over-enthusiastic stick-shifting sometimes leads to synchromesh failure: listen for crunching when changing gear, particularly on second and third; an early warning sign is snatching when going into third.

If the transmission fluid is allowed to overheat, the gearbox may start to whine – if you find a car fitted with a gearbox oil cooler, you can be pretty sure it's been on track. Difficulty engaging gears may also be due to wear in linkages, especially on high-mileage machines.

The ATB is tough, and is designed to aid traction and cornering ability. But it also enhances the RS's tendency to tramline and follow road cambers, and gained the car an unruly reputation. Later-built examples are reckoned to be equipped with less-aggressive differentials, so if you're concerned about having to hold on tight, it may be worth trying a couple of cars before buying.



RS transmission incorporates limited-slip differential; check 'box for worn synchromesh.

Suspension

4 3 2 1

You won't need an extensive test drive to check a sporting Mk1 Focus: if it doesn't immediately feel sharp, there's probably something amiss. Even a high-mileage example should be fun on twisty roads.

The regular Mk1 Focus was widely praised for its poise, the ST170 is better still, and the RS is amazing – although its underpinnings are unique and difficult to find.

The Mk1 should have a slightly nose-down stance, but tired coil springs tend to lower the rear end and create a floppy ride. Snapped springs are also pretty common.



ST170 front springs have a tendency to snap, but this may not be noticed on an initial inspection.

Roof

4 3 2 1

It's rare to find an ST170 with a sunroof, which was a factory-fitted optional extra. If fitted, make sure the electric motor tilts and slides the roof; if it's slow it may have simply seized, while non-operation could be a faulty switch.

Check there's no corrosion in the sunroof tray and that the drains are free from dirt and debris. Clogged drains can result in rust in the channels, or leaks into the cabin – so inspect for damp inside.

The RS was not available with a sunroof.

Rear spoiler

4 3 2 1

Believe it or not, Ford didn't equip every sporting Focus with a rear spoiler. In



fact, it was a (widely-specified) optional extra on the ST170, so don't be concerned if it's not on the car you're viewing.

The RS had a larger version of the spoiler as standard. Paint can sometimes craze, which will need stripping and respraying.

Rear spoiler wasn't standard equipment on the basic ST170.

Tailgate

4 3 2 1

The tailgate is shared with the ordinary Focus, and it's equally prone to corrosion. The most common spot for rot is around the edges of the tailgate handle where the paint wears thin, leading to localised rust.

Also check beneath the wiper and around the entire frame of the whole boot lid, which can corrode on the lip.

Ensure the tailgate can be opened by the switch inside the car and/or the button on the key fob. The solenoid could be to blame, or the wiring from the roof into the boot lid may be broken.

Rear wiper/motor

4 3 2 1

It's common for the rear wiper to be defective, caused by breakage or chafing of the wiring loom where it passes from the car body into the tailgate, or possibly a failed relay. No big deal.

Inner wings (fenders)

4 3 2 1

Inner wings should be body-coloured but metallics are unlacquered. Look carefully for fresh paintwork, which could indicate accident damage. Beware of creases, splits or rust on the seams.

Pride of place in an RS is the carbon-fibre console, equipped with green starter button and individually-numbered plaque. An RS without its build number is worrying, but on any car needs to be inspected carefully (see chapter 7). If the green button has 'engine start' around the rim, it's from a later-built RS; early cars should be plain. An RS should also have its Sparco handbrake handle and aluminium RS gearknob in place.

Some owners have changed the RS console for an ST170 item, which has a pair of cupholders in front of the gearstick. The swap involves heating up the carbon fibre surround, so be sure it's been done neatly.

The ST170 centre console features a button to disable either traction control or ESP (Electronic Stability Programme), which was an optional extra. Traction control shows a diagram of a car wheel spinning, while ESP highlights a car skidding; there should be a corresponding light in the instrument display when the button is pressed.



The ST170's improved interior lighting may have been retrofitted to an RS.

Switchgear

4 3 2 1



ST170 variable-speed wiper stalk may be retrofitted to RS.



ST170 has TC or ESP button to disable the system.

Pedals

4 3 2 1

The ST170 and RS have aluminium pedal covers, but the RS's should have Sparco branding.

The ST is prone to a vibrating accelerator pedal when driving – particularly at high revs. The usual fix is a new throttle cable. You might also find the pedal is sticking after you lift off the gas. Again, a new cable could be the cure, although cleaning the throttle body butterfly flap may be a cheap and simple solution.



The rubber-studded aluminium ST170 pedals. RS's should have Sparco branding.

Carpet

4 3 2 1

Age may be taking its toll on a Mk1's carpet, especially around the driver's heel pad.

The RS suffers in particular, being a stitched version of the ST170 part and most likely splitting and ripping in the rear footwells.

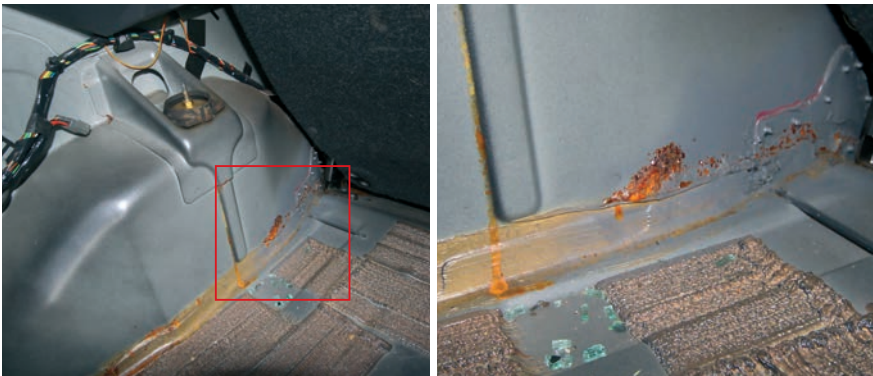
Ensure the car you're viewing still has its unique overmats with RS logos, which were fitted from new and now costly to replace.

Luggage compartment

4 3 2 1

Ignore the boot (trunk) at your peril! Roll back the carpet and check the boot floor; rust is a bad sign.

Pull up the carpeted sections over the inner rear wheelarches, and fold down the back seat. It's very common to find substantial corrosion along the seams, which can be a nightmare to repair because the rot needs to be cut out and new steel welded in its place.



Peel back the carpeted inner wheelarches – you might see serious rot.