

COMPARO ECOSPORT vs TUV300 vs VITARA BREZZA

# Tall toddlers

The compact SUV segment has finally got what could be its most important entrant

Words Rohit Paradkar Photography Suresh Narayanan

**T**all is the new cool," says Maruti Suzuki as they let loose their first contender in the sub-four metre SUV space. That clearly is justification for putting a hatchback-sized vehicle on stilts and hoping it attracts customers who have ambitions to buy an SUV. It is like men growing beards to look manlier on their Tinder profile pictures and hoping that women swipe right. Interestingly, it does seem to be working. But who amongst the current crop of sub-compact SUVs can really lay claim to saying 'I is the new cool', bad English by the way? That is what we are about to explore.

**DESIGN**  
The Ford EcoSport is the best example of this phenomenon. A Fiesta hatchback-based chassis covered with puffed up bodywork that draws inspiration from beefier SUVs that wear the blue oval. The result is a car that looks imposing despite its diminutive size. Though four years old in the market, it still manages to look handsome and that is precisely the reason why the recent update given to it was so mild that you wouldn't spot it at a passing glance, unless those slim LED running lamps grabbed your attention. We hear that a more comprehensive facelift is in the works, but is at least a year away.

The Ford EcoSport has enjoyed a virtually unrivalled run. The only challenge is the recently arrived Mahindra TUV300. But the Indian SUV giant has been clear in its approach with the TUV. They wanted to build a true compact SUV. A rigid one to take on everything from the smooth roads in the metros to the non-existent ones in rural India. The TUV300, hence, is based on the Scorpio's proven body-on-frame architecture. Though the TUV's straight lines and slab sides look out of place by today's design standards and that can polarise buyers, it tends to grow on you and has plenty of presence.

The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza is the production form of the 2012 XA Alpha concept. Through its four year journey to the production line it has gone through plenty of changes. From the rumoured Swift underpinnings to getting a new C-platform and from preview-

ing a boxy design to transforming into a more contemporary form, the Brezza is well-poised to take the market by storm. The Vitara inspired styling gives it the appearance of an urban SUV, while the floating roof effect and the hunched shoulder line give it the sense of expense that one associates with an SUV. Detailing by way of the offset turn blinkers in the front bumpers, the faux scuff plates and the black cladding all-around prevent the bodywork from looking drab. The optional dual-tone paint scheme on the top spec trim looks quite good too, while the trims without it don't look bad either. To me, it did not evoke a 'wow' expression the way the EcoSport or the Creta did the first time I saw them. But the Vitara Brezza certainly is handsome and like most cars from this stable, it has a design that should age well.

**CABIN, PRACTICALITY AND SAFETY**  
The EcoSport still has one of the smartest looking cabins at this price point, though not necessarily the most functional. The cellphone-inspired layout for its infotainment switchgear can be confusing to use



COMPARO ECOSPORT vs TUV300 vs VITARA BREZZA



The Mahindra 3-cylinder engine is the least refined on this test but has amazing low-end torque that should impress its target audience. The TUV's big on space too. Cabin a big improvement for Mahindra



due to the sheer number of buttons. The interface for the hardware and software is sorted, although a touchscreen infotainment should have been offered by now. Finding a good driving position on the EcoSport isn't difficult, but the front passenger seat is set a bit higher than expected. The front seats felt tight for my frame but the cushioning wasn't uncomfortable over long distances. The rear seats are nicely contoured for two adults, but fitting three abreast is a problem. There is no doubt that the EcoSport's cabin is the smallest in this test, but ingress and egress is easy. It is also the safest place to be in - from the reassuring thud of the doors to the safety kit consisting of up to six airbags, traction control, ESP, ISOFIX points for child seats and the automated emergency calling function.

The Mahindra TUV300 needs you to climb into the cabin, thanks to its high floor. Brighter materials instantly make the cabin feel the roomiest, and it actually is. The Scorpio underpinnings also give it the widest body of these three cars. The first and second row seats mean while, are large and accommodating. Yes there is a third row as well, made up of two jump seats in the boot. They aren't very safe in case of a rear end collision, but are an advantage over the other two cars nevertheless. The Mahindra TUV300's dashboard looks smart and functional, however, the integration of AUX and 12V ports looks like an afterthought. I would have preferred a more conventional placement for the window switches as well, which are now placed on the tunnel console. That said, all controls fall easily at hand. The TUV300 also has plenty of cubby holes and spaces for knick knacks and most of them are easily accessible too, unlike the Ford.

Given its price point, the Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza will also take on the likes of the Swift and the Baleno. It takes a similar all-black approach for its cabin. But though it doesn't share showroom space with



The Vitara Brezza's cabin is functional, but most goodies are only available on the top trim. It uses the familiar 1.3l diesel but has a higher output than its hatchback siblings. Decent space, though not best in class



COMPARO ECOSPORT vs TUV300 vs VITARA BREZZA



EcoSport's cabin looks great even today, but is cluttered with switches and controls. Reclining rear seats are roadtrip friendly but this cabin is the least spacious here. Lovely engine and driving dynamics though



the Baleno, I would urge you to test drive both these cars. There is a difference in the quality levels of the materials used. The Brezza also gets scratchy plastics, but the fit and finish doesn't match up to its siblings. In this test, it was on par with the Mahindra, but never felt as sophisticated as the Ford. I had criticised the EcoSport's plastics when I had first reviewed it, but all the rivals that followed haven't offered anything better.

The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza incorporates the SmartPlay touchscreen infotainment system that is now common with the manufacturer's premium offerings. It easily pits the other two cars with its Apple CarPlay and MirrorLink integration, a satellite navigation system and a cleaner and more ergonomic interface for its switchgear. Most switches and ports come from Maruti's common parts bin, which means you could either appreciate the familiarity or feel shortchanged as the Vitara Brezza's cabin makes it feel just another Maruti. The latter is more likely as the Vitara Brezza's cabin, despite being smart, doesn't replicate the flamboyance of its exterior. The marketing spiel which includes terms like 'sporty', 'fashionable' and 'youthful' falls flat here. Most of the kit worth talking about is restricted to the top-spec ZDI and ZDI+ trims and in that sense, the mid-spec variants of the Mahindra TUV300 and the Ford EcoSport offer better value.

The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza scores big on space though. It isn't as large as the Mahindra TUV300, but is significantly more accommodating than the Ford EcoSport. The legroom and headroom even at the back are well sorted. It gets smaller seats like the Swift though, so under-thigh squabs feel inadequate. One area of improvement is the placement of the front seat rails which cut sharply into the rear foot space.

The driver airbag is standard on the base trim of the Maruti Su-

zuki Vitara Brezza. The Mahindra TUV300 and the Ford EcoSport only get them from the mid-spec trims. Anti-lock brakes are optional on the Vitara Brezza, which is very disappointing! They should have been standard across the range for all these cars, given their high price points. Maruti Suzuki is quick to point out that there is their is the only vehicle ICAI-tested in India for offset and side collision impact - a test that the ARAI will make mandatory from 2017.

**RIDE AND HANDLING**  
The Ford EcoSport drives impressively thanks to its stiff monocoque chassis. It employs MacPherson struts up front and a semi-independent twist beam at the back. Though it doesn't handle like a typical Ford, it is quite competent for the segment it plays in. Body roll is comparable to other hatchbacks, while shock absorption is quite good. It is still a bit stiffer when compared to the Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza, but that endows the Ford EcoSport with better handling characteristics. However, the Ford could have done with better tyres. The TUV300, like most other Mahindra SUVs, has excellent ride. The soft suspension absorbs almost everything that the Indian roads can throw at it, without any of it reaching your backside. But on a series of undulations, the vehicle does tend to bounce around a bit. It's the same around twisties too. The Cat Czars offer decent grip on tarmac and that imparts a bit of confidence, but the Mahindra TUV300 clearly isn't a 'sporty' utility vehicle. It will happily glide over broken roads and potholes instead and that's what it sets out to do, really.

The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza achieves a fine balance between handling and ride comfort. Being designed and made in India, Maruti Suzuki has poured all their know-how in to setting this car up for Indian roads. You will instantly realise that it doesn't have the stiff-

COMPARO ECOSPORT vs TUV300 vs VITARA BREZZA



ROAD TEST NO.	Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza ZDI+ ★★★★★	Ford EcoSport Titanium+ ★★★★★	Mahindra TUV 300 T8 ★★★★★
<b>TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS</b>			
<b>ENGINE</b>			
Type	Inline four turbo diesel	Inline four turbo diesel	Inline three turbo diesel
Engine capacity(cc)	1,248	1,496	1,493
Valvetrain	4 valves per cylinder	4 valves per cylinder	4 valves per cylinder
Max power	90PS@4,000rpm	100PS@3,750rpm	84PS@3,750rpm
Max torque	200Nm@1,750rpm	205Nm@1,750rpm	230Nm@1,500rpm
<b>UNDERPINNINGS</b>			
Suspension (F)	MacPherson strut	MacPherson strut	Double wishbone
Suspension (R)	Torsion beam	Torsion beam	Torsion beam
Brakes (Front/Rear)	Ventilated Disc / Drum	Ventilated Disc / Drum	Disc / Drum
Types	215/60 R16	205/60 R16	215/70 R15
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>			
0-100kmph	13.8s	13.4s	17.4s
Top speed	169kmph	172kmph	143kmph
<b>FUEL EFFICIENCY</b>			
Claimed	24.3kmpl	22.27kmpl	18.49kmpl
<b>GENERAL DATA</b>			
LxWxH(mm)	3,995x1,790x1,640	3,999x1,765x1,708	3,995x1,835x1,839
Wheelbase(mm)	2,500	2,520	2,680
PRICE (EX MUMBAI)	₹10.14 lakh	₹11.43 lakh	₹8.96 lakh

ness that its European siblings like the Swift or Baleno do. This one is softer. It does tend to get noisy with all the thudding and crashing sounds over deep potholes or sharp bumps, but it absorbs most of them pretty well. But at the same time, it doesn't roll around too much either. It has a bit of initial dive at turn in, after which the car maintains its composure. The Apollo A16c 4G tyres on our test car had admirable grip through winding roads and easily outclass the tyres on the other vehicles. These of course, were shod on the 16-inch wheels and it will be interesting to see how the higher profile 15-inch fare on the mid-spec trims of the Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza. But in a nutshell, the Vitara Brezza's balance of ride and handling will impress.

The clutch and the steering are quite light for city use and though the latter feels quite direct, I would have liked it to be a just a bit heavier at higher speeds like in the TUV300.

**POWERTRAIN PERFORMANCE**  
The Ford EcoSport's recent update gave its diesel engine a new state of tune. The 1.5-litre TDCI mill now puts 100PS of power which is 10PS more. If you recall the figures, this is the same output as the Figo Aspire's oil burner. However, in the Ford EcoSport, it doesn't feel as cracking to drive. It certainly is the quickest in this test with 100kmph coming up in 13.2s from a standstill, but remember that second power band in the Aspire which kicks in at 120kmph? Well, that's not there in the EcoSport. The engine is more refined than its other two rivals

and has a more linear power and torque delivery. Be it city or highway, it doesn't feel out of breath and pulling overtakes doesn't call for frequent gearshifts. The Ford EcoSport also feels like the most car-like to drive amongst these three and therefore, the easiest to drive.

The TUV300, on the other hand, will entice those looking for an SUV-like driving position. You sit as high as in the Scorpio and that gives you a more commanding view of the road. The engine is quite nice too for what it does. It is relatively rougher than its rivals, but also the toughest of the lot. It offers most of that torque from as low as 1,000rpm which means that there is plenty of pulling power in almost every gear. That also means that even with a full house, the Mahindra TUV300 pulls cleanly and carries out most of its chores without breaking into a sweat. It is the slowest to 100kmph though, thanks to its undisclosed yet evident heavy weight.

Unspiced or weight, the Vitara Brezza is the lightest car of the trio and that helps. The Brezza uses the trusty 1.3-litre Multijet engine, but unlike its hatchback siblings it uses the more powerful version from the S-Cross that gives it an output of 90PS and 200Nm. It also brings with it a variable geometry turbocharger which aims at eliminating turbo lag. Despite having the smallest engine in this test, it was only about half a second slower to 100kmph than the EcoSport at 13.8s. But it can achieve a top-speed of around 170kmph without feeling unimpaired. The engine, though, does feel stressed past the 150kmph mark. With a full house you won't be reaching those speeds easily, nor would it sound comfortable. In the real world, the Vitara Brezza

suffers from a weak low-end. The gearing ensures that it has enough juice to putter around town at low engine speeds, but pulling overtakes often requires a downshift.

All three cars come with five-speed manual gearboxes for their diesel engines, however, the TUV300 does have the edge here with its AMT option. The throws of the gear shifter are longest in the Mahindra TUV300, while the Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza has the shortest throws and the slickest feel on its shifter.

Braking is another important area of distinction among the three cars. The Mahindra TUV300's brakes feel a tad grabby and sudden and need getting used to. The Ford EcoSport's disc and drum setup feels spongy and in our previous tests, it has provided inconsistent feedback. The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza's brakes are excellent, surpassing the other two with precise feedback and a progressive feel. However, these brakes are known to eat up their brake pads in less than 15,000kms - a bargain you may make for their superior feel.

In a nutshell, all the three cars are quite different in the way they drive and target their audience.

**VERDICT**  
The Mahindra TUV300, though relatively utilitarian in feel, presents itself as a more stylish option to workhorses like the Baleno and Quanto. It is surprisingly well-put together for its price, and is the only crossover in this space to offer a seven-seat configuration and an AMT. In that sense, it offers tremendous value. In the various stints

that we had with it, the TUV300 has always proved to be tough and surprisingly reliable, which is what its target audience is looking for.

The Ford EcoSport is stylish and sophisticated. And though it has had small niggles every time we tested it, we have rated it high for the safety equipment on offer and the confidence its dynamics bring to customers. It also has the most diverse drivetrain options in this lot which enables it to appeal to a wider audience. However its age is showing. Four years on, things are now just too familiar and beginning to wear thin around the edges. That is one of the reasons why the EcoSport's numbers have been dropping consistently over the last year.

Maruti Suzuki however, has narrowed down the options because it believes it knows exactly what the market wants - a reliable, good looking compact SUV that comes with the promise of a robust service network. We would have loved to see a petrol powertrain option but Maruti does not have one that could complement the image of an SUV, until the turbo-petrol comes out later this year. The lack of a petrol and an automatic presently may strain its acceptance in several markets, especially given the current negative atmosphere around diesel.

But for what it lacks in terms of diversity it makes up for with its packaging. The Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza is not the best car in this price bracket, but it certainly is a package that offers the most peace of mind. I won't be surprised to see it sell in larger numbers than the other combinations. It's almost certain. But it's trust claim to fame will only come when we see just how big the gap is to its rivals and, for how long it can sustain that margin. It's not such an open shut case after all. **75**