

LIKES	DISLIKES
Performance Handling Comfort	Minor switch location Baulky gearshift

When it comes to Australian built sports sedans the choice is simple, Ford or Holden, blue or red, and that's black and white. For those in the blue camp the XR8 is their "hero" car. Power is supplied by a 5.4 litre quad cam V8 producing 260kW and a stump pulling 500Nm of torque. Wearing a none too subtle bodykit of skirts, spoilers and bonnet "bulge", the XR8's style is hard edged and business like.

VALUE FOR MONEY

PRICING

Both six speed manual (as tested), and four speed automatic are priced at \$51,275.

STANDARD FEATURES

The XR8 isn't just about the engine. Also included for the price are air-conditioning, cruise control, sports seats, leather steering wheel, power windows, trip computer, premium sound system, bodykit, alloy wheels and sports suspension. Options fitted to our test vehicle were 18" wheels (\$1500) and metallic paint (\$355). As with any local manufacturer the complete options list is extensive and includes features such as leather sports seats (\$2495), sat-nav (\$3600) and premium brakes (\$2950).

DESIGN & FUNCTION

SPACE & PRACTICALITY

This is a family size car so space isn't an issue, with generous room front and rear. If there is a compromise it's the unusually high driving position shared by all Falcons, which can limit headroom. The large boot will swallow a family's worth of luggage with more room available through a folding rear seat.

COMFORT

Standard sports seats provide the right mix of comfort and support. Generous padding makes long distance driving a breeze, and the thick side bolsters keep you in place through the corners. In back there is ample legroom, and three can fit across the wide bench seat with acceptable comfort. However, the low roofline and restricted door opening, make entry and exit awkward.

ERGONOMICS

Most of the controls are logically placed but some of the minor switches can be awkward to operate. The trip computer, hazard and dash dimmer switches are positioned on the instrument binnacle, and can be difficult to see and reach.

SAFETY

Standard safety equipment includes dual front airbags (side airbags are an option), front seat belt pre-tensioners, ABS brakes and traction control. ANCAP crash testing resulted in a four star rating for the BA series.

BUILD QUALITY & FINISH

Our test car's *Velocity Blue* metallic paint was blemish free but there was noticeable orange peel on all of the panels. Disregarding the ever present engine noise, the interior's fit-out was well executed and rattle free. However some elements remind you of the car's humble roots. The door grabhandle/armrests in particular look very cheap.

SECURITY

Scoring 57.5 under NRMA Insurance's security rating, the XR8 is well down compared to the class leading Mitsubishi Lancer EVO VIII (105) and BMW Z4 (102).

ON THE ROAD

FUEL

Based on Greenhouse Guide figures, the XR8's average fuel consumption of 13.8l/100km compares favourably to its closest rival the Holden Commodore SS at 14.8l/100km. Both cars achieve this figure on standard grade unleaded petrol.

PERFORMANCE

There is more than enough power on tap in any gear at any time. This is the XR8's *raison d'être*. With its huge reserves of torque steep hills are pummelled into submission on minimal throttle. And while you have six gears to choose from, they're almost superfluous unless you want to extract every last kilowatt. A quick glance at our acceleration times show the effect of torrential rain during our performance testing. What it also demonstrates is the traction control's tardy response to wheelspin, taking longer than expected to activate in the tricky conditions.

Under hard acceleration the big 5.4 litre isn't silky smooth but its throaty induction roar and booming exhaust note remind you why V8's create so much emotion.

RIDE

Standing on 40 series tyres and given the car's high performance character, the excellent ride quality is a pleasant surprise. Body movement is well controlled with the spring-damper combination providing the right mix of compliance without harshness. It copes easily with rougher road surfaces, although the big tyres tend to tramline.

HANDLING & STEERING

There's no shortage of grip thanks to the 245



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type.....DOHC 32v V8
Capacity in litres.....5.408
Induction.....Sequential multi-point EFI
Fuel recommendation ULP
Claimed max. power..... 260kW @ 5250rpm
Claimed max. torque..... 500Nm @ 4250rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type.....Six speed manual
Driving wheels.....Rear
WHEELS (As tested).....Alloy 18"x 8"
Tyres.....Dunlop Sport 9000 245/40ZR18
Spare.....Speed limited space-saver

STEERING

Type.....Power assisted rack & pinion
Turns lock to lock2.7
Turning circle.....11.3m

DIMENSIONS

Mass.....1745kg
Length.....4944mm
Width (incl. mirrors 2138mm).....1864mm
Height1444mm
Ground clearance (measured)120mm
Seating capacity5
Fuel tank capacity68litres

TOWING

Max. towed mass (trailer plus load)....1200kg

NRMA INSURANCE THEFT RATING

Points on 0-120 scale (high score best)57.5

WARRANTY3yr / 100,000km

MANUFACTURED INAustralia

TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION (Wet conditions)

50 - 80 km/h (in 3rd).....4.2sec
60 -100 km/h (in 3rd).....5.2sec
0 - 80 km/h.....7.0sec
0 - 100 km/h.....8.7sec
0 - 400 metres16.4sec

FUEL CONSUMPTION (litres/100 km)

Average (ADR 81/01).....13.8

BRAKING (Wet conditions)

Distance to stop from 80 km/h...30.1 metres

NOISE

Interior at constant 80 km/h65.8dB(A)

Test vehicle supplied by
Ford Australia
www.ford.com.au

Dunlop Sports. At over 1700kg the XR8 isn't a feather weight, and the V8's mass means this isn't an athletically agile sedan. Commit to a bend and it turns in well, but it needs a moment to convince the quad cam's extra bulk and wide tyres to change course. As cornering forces build up so does the steering's weight. But it all works to the driver's advantage. Cornering attitude is quickly adjusted with the throttle, mild understeer making way for oversteer - the car squatting on its rear suspension as you feed in more power. Settle into its rhythm and the XR8 is a rewarding drive.

BRAKING

Under most conditions the four wheel discs are up to the task. When the going gets tougher the standard brakes can start to show the strain. Not that they let us down, but you definitely felt you were closing in on their limit. Buyers who are hard on their brakes should opt for the Premium Brake Package (\$2950).

SMOOTHNESS & QUIETNESS

There is some obvious noise from the drivetrain, but in an odd way it adds to the XR8's appeal. Tough car - tough mechanicals. Not so appealing is the Tremec six speed gearbox's baulky nature. It needs some heft to slot from ratio to ratio and combined with a heavy clutch is a chore in city driving. On two occasions it objected to selecting first gear. Fortunately with the massive amount of torque available the car is happy to rumble around town in the taller gears, pulling away cleanly when you open up the throttle.

This isn't a car that isolates you from the mechanical goings on under its skin. Comfortable - yes. Quiet - to a degree. Even when you're loping along at freeway speeds the V8's brawny character is reminding you there's some menace lurking under your right foot.

SUMMARY:

The XR8 is big and brash. Its tough nature means you're expected to expend a little effort to access its full potential. But for the price of admission you receive an extremely competent high performance sedan that plays a great V8 soundtrack. Enjoy the ride.