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TEST DRIVE

Explorer at 28

2019 Ford Explorer XLT

DAN LYONS | text

Special to the Times Union

Explorer is a veteran name in the SUV segment, making its debut in model year 1991. This is the ninth year of Explorer's fifth generation. The big Ford (only Expedition is larger amongst blue oval SUVs) had a full refresh in 2016, and rolls into 2019 largely unchanged from last year's edition.



Five trim levels are offered (base, XLT, Limited, Sport and Platinum), with three engines and one transmission. The bottom three trims are available in front or all-wheel drive (the AWD upcharge is \$2,150), while Sport and Platinum are AWD only.

Prices range from \$29,995 - \$42,355, and my XLT tester had an as-tested price of \$45,120.

The standard engine on XLT is Ford's 3.5L V-6, (290 horsepower, 255 lb.-ft. of torque). Buyers can also opt for a 2.3L EcoBoost four-cylinder for an additional \$895. My XLT was so equipped, and though small in

2019 Ford Explorer XLT

MSRP: \$34,400 · As Tested: \$45,920

displacement, the turbocharged, direct injected four has plenty of power, making 280 h.p. and 301 lb.-ft. of torque.

Fuel economy isn't a hallmark of big utes and that's true here as elsewhere. EPA says the six will return 17/24/20 (FWD) and 16/22/19 (AWD), while the turbo four is rated at 19/27/22 (FWD) and 18/25/21 (AWD). I averaged 17 miles per gallon.

The choice of engine here is a matter of sound and feel. The four has more, power-wise, and while engine noise is a constant, it's not bothersome. Explorer weighs in at 4,385 lb. (FWD) and 4,556 (AWD). Some people prefer the feel of a larger displacement engine in a larger vehicle, even when the power numbers are lower, owing to how the power is delivered (and how it sounds). Your test drive will settle the matter.

There is another engine offering for Explorer, but only on the top, two trim levels, where it's standard equipment. This is the EcoBoost version of the 3.5L V-6. With turbocharging and direct injection, the power numbers are bumped up to 365 h.p. and 350 lb.-ft., which is said to be sufficient to move the Explorer from



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURER

THE FORD EXPLORER has been a standby in the SUV segment since 1991. Now in its fifth generation, Explorer is offered in five trim levels, with a standard 3.5L V-6 and optional 2.3L four-cylinder 2.3L and 3.5L V-6 EcoBoost engines.

0-60 in about six seconds. That's plenty fast for a vehicle this size, and would figure to change its driving personality appreciably. The suspension in Sport models is beefed up to accommodate the engine upgrade. Platinum is not, which gives the nod to the former in terms of drivability.

Regardless of engine choice, a six-speed automatic transmission is standard on all models. Explorer can tow up to 5,000 lb., when properly equipped, and trailer sway control comes standard.

Explorer feels its size when cornering or in tight quarters, and while I don't know how the sporty the Sport model is, I do know that the XLT isn't. But, that's

not in the job description. The accent is on the "Utility" in Sport Utility Vehicle. Explorer XLT rides comfortably and handles respectably, with some side to side body roll evident on bumpy roads. AWD equipped models maintain a front wheel drive bias most of the time, channeling more power rearward as needed to maintain optimum grip. The Terrain Management system is accessed via console mounted dial. Drivers can choose four settings — Normal, Mud, Sand or Snow — which adjust several parameters

to best suit the conditions at hand. Hill Descent Control is optional on the bottom three trim levels and optional on the top two. That said, the majority of SUVs will

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