

BUYER'S GUIDE FOCUS RS500

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RS500. The most evocative name in the fast Ford world. The ultimate RS. The brand that means rarity, maximum performance and pure investment potential.

Everyone knows RS500 equals expensive, and the Focus-based version is quickly catching its Sierra RS500 predecessor. Okay, the Focus RS500 was more limited-edition run-out model than motorsport homologation special, but that hasn't stopped it from becoming one of the most desirable Blue Ovals money can

buy. As the pinnacle of the Mk2 Focus RS development, the 500 is the one to have.

The Focus RS500 was launched at the Leipzig Motor Show on 9 April 2010. A celebration to signify the end of Mk2 RS production, the RS500 was factory-tuned from the regular RS's 301bhp to 346bhp.

More exclusively, each RS500 was painted Panther Black, coated in a satin-black 3M wrap. The standard 19in RS rims were also black-painted, and the interior gained a carbon-look centre console insert with individually-

numbered plaque.

True to its name, 500 examples of Ford's finest Focus were offered for sale to the public, across 20 European markets; the UK received 101. Thanks to the hype of Nurburgring testing by TeamRS and a dedicated website, the RS500 sold out within hours.

And from there the interest rocketed, with prices of even the tattiest used examples higher today than they were when new.

If there's an RS500-shaped hole in your garage, you need to act fast. Here's how to buy one.

“As the pinnacle of the Mk2 Focus RS development, the 500 is the one to have”

HOW MUCH TO PAY

£35,000 TO £40,000

There's not much dross in the RS500 world, but this is where you'll find it. A scruffy high-mileage (around 50,000) car or insurance write-off will be here, as will an unwrapped, over-modified machine.

£40,000 TO £50,000

Most RS500s are prized possessions residing in heated garages, and you'll need to find at least 40 big ones to get your hands on a tidy car worth treasuring.

£50,000 TO £60,000

A sub-10,000-mile machine will set you back £50k. A 30-mile RS500 without sat nav recently sold for £60,000.

WHERE TO BUY ONE

RS500s don't turn up every day. And when they do, there's usually a queue of wealthy punters lining up to look.

To bag yours, you've two real options. The first is to befriend as many RS500 enthusiasts as possible. Join the owners' clubs, use the forums and social media, and you'll eventually hear when a car is coming up for sale.

The other is to keep your eye on specialist dealers, none more so than RS Direct, which, over the years, has had more than half the UK's allocation of RS500s through its doors.

RS Direct boss Adrian Thompson says, "Most people come to us to buy or sell an RS500. If I took the number of everyone who wants one, I'd have a waiting list of 50. We've just had a 2000-mile RS500 and sold it in minutes."

INSURANCE COSTS

It almost goes without saying, but a Focus RS500 isn't the sort of car you insure by phoning a camp bald bloke wiggling his silicone-stuffed backside around on TV adverts. A vehicle of this price, rarity and performance needs a broker who's not just familiar with specialist cars, but in particular accustomed to the buoyant market for desirable Blue Ovals.

Essentially, that means seeking out one of the firms that advertises in *Fast Ford*, or joining the RS Owners' Club and bagging a policy through one of its accredited schemes.

Crucially, you'll need to ensure your insurer understands an RS500 isn't a regular RS and offers a suitable agreed-value policy with limited-mileage discount. And don't forget to increase the insured sum every year.

VITAL STATS

MADE 2010
PRICE WHEN NEW £35,450
PRICE NOW £30,000 to £60,000
TOP SPEED 165mph
POWER 346bhp @ 6400rpm
TORQUE 339lb.ft @ 2500-4500rpm
0-60 5.4 seconds
NUMBER BUILT 500 (101 UK sales);
 12-or-so pre-production/press cars

TECH SPEC

ENGINE

2522cc, in-line five-cylinder, 20-valve, DOHC Duratec with alloy block and head, forged crankshaft and connecting rods, graphite-coated piston sleeves, 8.5:1 compression ratio, toothed belt drive, Ti-VCT (twin independent variable cam timing), Borg Warner K16 turbocharger, enlarged intercooler, sequential electronic fuel injection, uprated fuel pump, Bosch ME 9.0 ECU, enlarged airbox, larger-diameter downpipe, software remap.

TRANSMISSION

Front-wheel drive with Getrag Ford Durashift M66 six-speed manual gearbox, Quaife automatic torque biasing (ATB) limited-slip differential, uprated driveshafts, 240mm clutch.

BRAKES

336mm ventilated discs (front), 300mm ventilated discs (rear), red-painted callipers, ABS with electronic brake force distribution (EBD).

SUSPENSION

MacPherson struts, gas-filled dampers, coil springs, 24mm anti-roll bar, RevoKnuckle with fixed mount to anti-roll bar (front), independent short-long arm control blade multi-link system, gas-filled dampers, coil springs, 24mm anti-roll bar (rear), 40mm wider track, electronic stability programme (ESP) and Traction Assist (TA).

WHEELS AND TYRES

8.5x19in 15-spoke RS alloys in metallic Panther Black and Continental 235/35x18 tyres.

INTERIOR

Recaro front seats with partial-leather trim, three-spoke RS steering wheel with red stitching, angled dashboard gauges, carbon-look dashboard trim, individually-numbered hand-engraved plaque on centre console, aluminium gearknob and pedals, red stitching on gear lever gaiter and door trims, black headlining, dual-zone climate control, auto-dim rear-view mirror, tyre deflation detection, key-free system, Sony six-disc audio system with Bluetooth voice control and USB port, floor mats with red stitching. Optional touchscreen DVD navigation/audio system and red-leather Recaro front seats/black leather rear bench (Europe only).

EXTERIOR

Three-door Focus hatchback body with wider wheelarches, RS bodykit including front bumper with fog lights and piano black mesh grille, deeper side skirts and rear bumper, black WRC-style roof spoiler, chromed xenon headlamps, bonnet vents, RS-badged wing vents, rear privacy glass, rear parking sensors, automatic headlights, rain-sensing wipers. Available only in Panther Black metallic with 3M satin black vinyl wrap, blue RS badges and red 500 badge.

The RS500 takes the standard RS's 301bhp and beefs it up to a much meaner 346bhp



Retaining stock parts, such as the original exhaust system, will help retain future values



TRANSMISSION

The RS500 used the stock Mk2 RS transmission, with a six-speed Getrag Ford Durashift M66 gearbox and Quaife ATB limited-slip differential. That means it's strong and effective, and no cause for concern. Of course, it's worth checking for clutch slip if an RS500 has been driven hard (we've all seen pics of RS500 press cars smoking their front tyres), and anything that's been tuned beyond 400bhp could also be suffering. We've heard folk worrying about driveshaft troubles but on the RS (and RS500) they're as tough as you'll ever need them to be. Unless you want the most factory-original car possible, don't be afraid to buy an RS500 equipped with a quickshift kit – they're easy to fit, great to use and simple to return to standard.

ENGINE

Essentially a regular five-cylinder Volvo-made Mk2 RS engine boasting Mountune MP350 goodies, the RS500's 346bhp unit is, according to Gary Lendon at Collins Performance, bulletproof. The MP350 kit included bigger intercooler (twice the size of standard), larger airbox (here wearing RS500 badge), uprated fuel pump (6 bar rather than 4, a special Bosch in-tank part that costs £1800 to replace, available only from Ford), enlarged exhaust downpipe and mild ECU remap (most of the extra power was thanks to the fuel pump). The downpipe is nothing special, so a Mongoose 3in system makes sense – but make sure the stock exhaust is included when you buy, in order to retain future value.

Regular care is all the RS500's powerplant needs: a service every year/12,000 miles, auxiliary belts at 60,000, and cambelt at 100k (not that RS500s are being driven so much). Interestingly, some RSs run better after a cambelt swap, with Collins noticing slight timing discrepancies from the factory. Check the oil regularly – a bad RS can burn a litre every 3000 miles, while some owners have reported leaks from the oil pressure relief valve; don't buy until the seller has resolved any drips. Monitor coolant levels continually – the RS's radiator is prone to leaking at the corners, and hoses can rub through.

Very few RS500s have been tuned, but remember figures of over 450bhp require forged engine internals – any more, and it will go bang.



Stock brakes are great, but pricey to replace so ensure there's some life left in them

BRAKES

Fabulous brakes came as standard on the Focus RS, and the RS500 used exactly the same setup but for red-painted callipers. Collins Performance retains the OE kit even on highly-tuned cars, but don't expect them to last long. They're also particularly pricey – you'll get no change from £600 for off-the-shelf Ford front discs and pads – so make sure there's plenty of meat left on your potential purchase's stoppers, and watch out for brake judder on the test drive.

Some cars have been upgraded with expensive AP discs and callipers, but don't forget anything non-standard could adversely affect an RS500's eventual value. That said, Ferodo DS2500 pads mated to stock discs are highly-rated among those who like to drive their cars hard, and no one will notice the difference from a cursory glance.

SUSPENSION

Like the Mk2 RS on which it was based, the RS500's suspension is phenomenal, with negligible issues.

Key to the car's fabulous handling is the funky RevoKnuckle front end, which keeps the tyres in contact with the road – resulting in very heavy tyre wear when driven hard. The rubber remains intact when pottering around, but expect to kill tyres within a few thousand miles if you enjoy the car's performance. Check the tyres' inner edges very carefully (preferably from underneath the car), stick with the RS500's factory-recommended Continental ContiSportContact 3s, and ensure the geometry is set spot-on.

Front arm bushes are prone to failing rapidly (polyurethane replacements are cost-effective and also help the handling), and it's not unusual to hear annoying squeaks and rattles. Most common are clonks from beneath the boot, caused by perished anti-roll bar drop link bushes; the RS's rear end is Kuga-based but with an uprated anti-roll bar, which makes the drop links sit at an awkward angle. Adaptors are available to reposition them vertically.





BODY

Bad to the bone, the RS500's black bodywork was more than skin deep. Unlike any other Focus RS, each RS500 was painted Panther Black metallic at the Saarlouis Ford plant, then coated in a satin-black wrap by 3M at a dedicated facility near Frankfurt. And note the words 'satin black' – most people presume the RS500's wrap to be matt, but when compared with the real thing the difference is noticeable.

Ford claimed the film was, "Extremely durable... designed to resist superficial marks and scratches," but it couldn't be further from the truth. The RS500's wrap blemishes if you stare at it too harshly, the edges can lift if tormented with a power washer, and the vinyl's life expectancy is limited due to natural shrinkage.

Needless to say, it's not unusual to see an RS500 with a tatty wrap, and some have even been refinished badly. RS Direct rewraps almost every car it

sells (a four-figure sum), so account for the difference when viewing.

On the plus side, an unwrapped Panther Black RS500 looks particularly pleasant, and some buyers prefer seeing the car naked to ensure its body is perfect before taking the plunge. A few also prefer to leave it unwrapped simply because they enjoy polishing their cars (bear in mind Swissvax Opaque products allow thorough cleaning of a satin-wrapped RS500).

Some examples of the regular Focus RS have been seen with rusty rear wheelarches, although the RS500 seems to be unafflicted – possibly because the vinyl wrap forms a barrier between the rear bumper, where paintwork rubs away from excessive movement.

Finally, note the RS500 also wore unique badging, including red 500 logo on the tailgate.

“The RS500's black bodywork was more than skin deep”



Red stitching rather than blue helped differentiate the RS500's interior from the standard RS

INTERIOR

A Focus RS500 can be easily identified by a build plaque mounted on the centre console, hand-engraved with a unique identification number from 001 to 500. Even the fascia itself was particular to the RS500, being finished in a carbon-fibre effect. Needless to say, don't go near an RS500 without its plaque, and reckon on big bucks if you want to replace the console.

The RS500 boasted a few other unique touches compared with the regular RS, including red stitching (instead of blue) on the leather trim of the steering wheel, door trim and gear lever gaiter, along with the Ford-supplied floor mats, which should be present on the car you purchase.

Part-leather front seats were standard on the RS500, in black with red stitching rather than the blue stitching found on the normal Focus RS. Expect to see a worn bolster if the car's high-mileage.

It was widely reported that one of only two options for the RS500 was full-leather trim, including red leather Recaro front seats, black leather rear bench and door cards. Sadly, this option wasn't available in the UK, although two known right-hand-drive cars made it to Ireland, and a pair of British buyers retrofitted the interior from new, at a cost of around £4500 from Ford.

Today, RS Direct reckons you'd pay a £3000 premium for an RS500 with leather trim.



UK cars were only offered with part leather seats, but full leather was available in other markets



ELECTRICS

According to RS Direct, around 90 per cent of RS500s were fully-loaded, complete with optional touchscreen DVD navigation and audio system (aka Luxury Pack 2). And a couple of years ago, the price of a car could be knocked massively (as much as £5000) if it didn't come with sat nav. But not any more – in fact, the value of an RS500 is currently unaffected by the Luxury Pack.

Everything else that was otherwise optional on a Focus RS was standard on the RS500, including Luxury Pack 1, with dual-zone automatic climate control, rear parking sensors, rain-sensing wipers, key-free start, auto-dimming rear-view mirror, tyre deflation detection and Bluetooth with voice control. So make sure it's all present and correct.

Like most modern Fords, the kit is pretty reliable, although reverse cameras are prone to fogging up, which is £200 to fix.



IDENTITY

At double the price of a regular RS, it's crucial to check the identity of a Focus RS500 before you buy. Fortunately, despite there being a few ST-based lookalikes kicking around, RS Direct is yet to see a fake RS500 passing itself off as the real thing.

It's vital to start with a history check for write-offs, outstanding finance and stolen cars – only one or two RS500s have been declared a total loss by insurance companies, but the cars are targets for thieves. If any of the RS500-

kit is absent, start asking questions.

All production RS500s were built between May and July 2010, and the VIN should reflect this, starting in WFOGXXGCDGAJ (May), WFOGXXGCDGAU (June) or WFOGXXGCDGAM (July) followed by five unique numbers. These RS500s made up the entire allocation of customer cars – a full 500, with 101 sold to the UK. Each had a hand-engraved dashboard plaque bearing the build number (eg No. 001/500).

There was also a batch of press demonstrators – rumoured to be 12, but possibly as few as ten or as many as 15 – with distinctive numbered plaques, such as PR No. 01. The chassis numbers of these Focuses began with WFOGXXGCDGAT (for April 2010). RS Direct reckons the price of press cars to be roughly equal to that of customer RS500s, with exclusivity a trade-off against the rough treatment such machines received in the hands of magazine hacks.

You may also find an un-numbered RS500 for sale, which could be a pre-production car. It's believed that three (if not more) test mules were built prior to the press cars; at least one had an unusual specification such as the usual RS blue seat stitching and Luxury Pack but lacking keyless entry. According to RS Direct, one prototype was white beneath the wrap; expect the value of a pre-production car to be higher than a regular Focus RS but less than an RS500. 

CONTACTS

Focus RS500.com
www.focusrs500.com

Ford RS Owners' Club
www.rsoownersclub.co.uk

Focus RS Owners' Club
www.focusrsoc.com/forums

Ford Focus Owners' Club
www.ffoc.co.uk/forum

RS500 VIN list
www.swededemon.com/SD500

RS Direct
01454 300077
www.rs-direct.co.uk

Collins Performance
01260 279604
www.collinsperformance.com

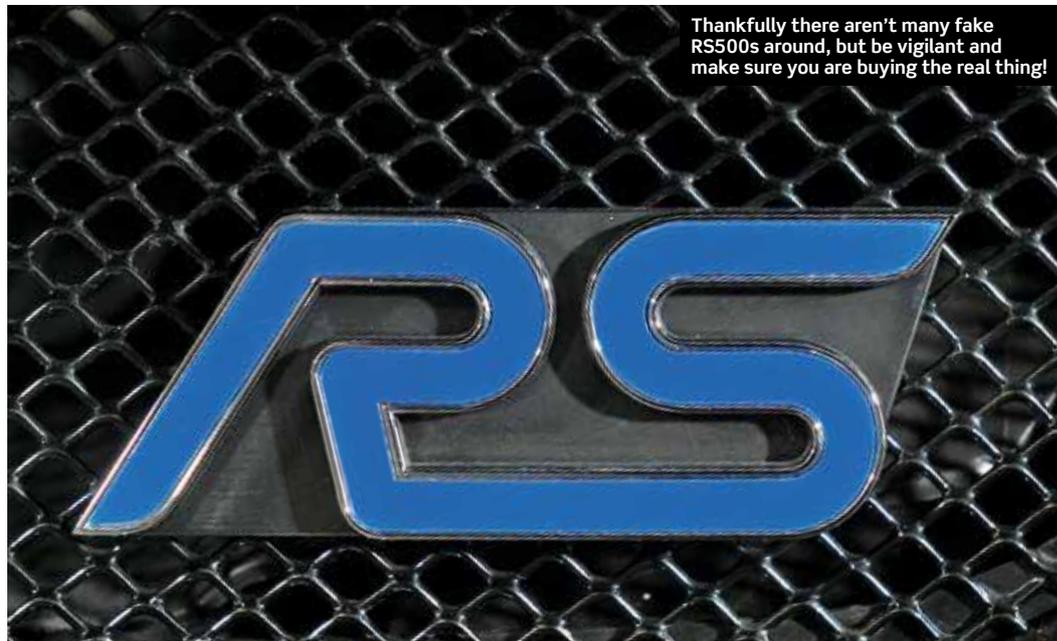
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