

A bargain SUV with polish

YEARS of austerity have affected us all. Living in a country, a society, a world that relies on the never never was never going to work, was it?

We all got a bit giddy with low interest rates and countless credit but when the great meltdown occurred, who wasn't hit hard?

The good thing, as we all try to get our finances back in the black, is that we are now all in the market for a bargain. In a counter-brand, anti-label revolution there is now great joy in paying less not more. It's a global movement that has worked to the advantage of bargain brands like Aldi, Lidl, Dacia.

Yes, Dacia, that's Romania's national manufacturer that is now more Renault than anything else and all the better for it. I became a big fan of the Duster the moment I saw it and now it's been tickled a bit, it's better still.

Consider its specification and what you might pay if this SUV carried a different badge. This is a big, purposeful, practical off-roader. It has four wheel drive so it will tackle the great off-road and on-road conditions plagued with mud, gravel, snow or ice.

It looks good with nice proportions, chunky roof rails, attractive front and rear and muscular wheelarches. It is

roomy with large comfortable seats, bags of cabin space and a decent boot. Duster is also well specified with cruise control, aircon, touch screen trip computer and satellite navigation, central locking, electric windows; this thing wants for nothing.

The dash is functional and while the plastics are a bit plasticky, the trim is good enough. Now a specification like this could quite easily command a £30,000 price tag – the Dacia is £15K. Now that has got to be the bargain of the day.

But price set aside, badge covered, what is this SUV like to live with? Truth is that it is brilliant. The gearbox is light and positive, clutch, throttle and brakes spot on and the 1.5 litre diesel is as good as anything you could hope to come across. It has loads of power, real oomph in the all-important mid-range, but is great on the motorway where it is happy to return 57 mile per gallon.

Handling and ride are superb making Duster an absolute pleasure to drive. It handles brilliantly in the bends and the suspension soaks up everything our roads can throw at it. Duster is a great car in very respect and when you look at the price it has to be the best value vehicle on the road.

Fact File

Dacia Duster
 Engine: 1.5 diesel
 Power: 109BHP
 0-62mph: 12.5 secs
 Top speed:
 104mph
 Combined miles
 per gallon: 53.3
 Transmission: six
 speed manual
 CO2 g/km: 135



By Ian Lamming