



Ford Transit: The Evolution of an Icon from 1965 to 2025

Ford's legendary Transit commercial vehicle family is this year celebrating its 60th anniversary, marking six decades of loyal service to hard-working businesses of all sizes since the first example left the production line in August 1965. This is the latest landmark in Transit's extensive history, which has seen the iconic family of commercial vehicles achieve growing popularity around the world, and "Transit" become a byword for getting the job done.

Pre-1965

Prior to 1965, Ford offered two independent commercial vehicle lines for European customers – the FK van from Germany launched in 1953 and the Thames van from the UK launched in 1954. As the Sixties dawned, there was a clear demand from van customers for greater ability – more load area capacity, more payload, more flexibility and more speed – and Ford decided to replace the two models with an all-new generation of purpose-built vans that would address the needs of all European markets and be built in both the UK and Germany.

1965

The first ever Transit came down the line at the company's Langley commercial vehicle plant in Berkshire, England on August 9. It was already packed with innovations like a printed circuit in the instrument panel, an optional steering lock, a side loading door and seatbelt attachment points. Soon after launch more innovations such as halogen headlights, tubeless tyres and weight-saving minimum leaf springs were introduced.

The original Transit was powered by 74 PS 1.7-litre or 86 PS 2.0-litre petrol engines and the first diesel was a Perkins 4/99 with 44 PS. It was available in two wheelbases, each with three payload derivatives (short-wheelbase from 610 kg to 1,120 kg, long-wheelbase from 1,272 kg to 1,782 kg). Vans could be built with twin rear doors or a tailgate, slam or sliding cab doors, and with or without a side loading door.

1968

Ford diesel engine production for Transit began at the Dagenham plant, close to London.

1971

Transit's appearance was modernised with the introduction of a more car-like grille.

1972

Ford introduced its first small high-speed diesel engine, called the York. It came in two power ratings, 55 PS for use in the short-wheelbase models and 62 PS for use in the heavier long-wheelbase models.

1973

To reduce running costs for owners, Transit was the first commercial vehicle to fit radial ply tyres across the range.

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1974

A new 1,000 kg payload model based on the long-wheelbase bodysell but running on single rear wheels was introduced.

1975

The new Mk2 Transit could immediately be recognised by a new functional “black look”. The grille, bumpers, windscreen trim and wing-mirrors were all painted black. Inside the cab the pedals were moved forward and the seat moved back to create 100 mm of extra legroom, while the steering column was lengthened to improve the driving position. Even more importantly, Transit was the first to use servo-assisted front disc brakes – in short-wheelbase models from 1975 and long-wheelbase models a year later.

1976

A new top-weight Transit, the 190, was introduced, taking Transit’s maximum gross weight to 3.5 tonnes. As part of this programme front disc brakes were introduced across the range, with the new heavyweight 190 featuring ventilated disc brakes for the first time on a medium commercial vehicle.

A major production milestone was reached as the one-millionth Ford Transit was driven off the assembly line.

1978

Transit’s first major styling change came with the launch of the new-shape model in March 1978. The hitherto stubby bonnet was now more streamlined and lengthened so that it could adequately package both petrol and the increasingly popular diesel engines. At the same time new, more fuel-efficient overhead cam (OHC) engines were introduced. Other changes included the introduction of Ford’s C3 automatic transmission and a new more powerful heater with car-like ducting.

1983

As part of the 2.5-litre direct injection (DI) diesel development programme, 100 prototype engines were used in an extensive field trial with operators.

1984

The revolutionary 2.5-litre DI diesel engine was introduced, which used a rotary fuel injection pump. It gave a power increase from 62 PS to 68 PS and yet at the same time led to fuel consumption improvements of up to 24 per cent on short-wheelbase models and 20 per cent on long-wheelbase models.

1985

Another production milestone – the two-millionth Ford Transit was produced on July 25, 1985.

1986

The next all-new Transit was introduced in January, just over 20 years after the original launch. This daringly radical “fast-front” Transit had a best-in-class drag coefficient (Cd) of 0.37 that was better than a number of cars at the time. While the load space was increased by between 11 per cent and 13.5 per cent, the Cd was reduced by 11 per cent, allowing a fuel consumption saving of up to 8 per cent.

The new nose was not just an aerodynamic device; it was also designed to collapse progressively in a crash and improve safety. The new wide bonnet also provided unrivalled access to the engine for servicing. The design team created bigger cab doors, with deeper windows giving a greater sense of space. Load access was improved by using wider and taller rear doors and increasing the width of the side loading door, so that it would accept a 1 metre-wide pallet. Other important changes included the introduction of modified MacPherson strut independent front suspension and rack-and-pinion steering on short-wheelbase models, direct glazing for the windscreen, plus the use of high security “Chubb-style” locks on doors and the ignition to improve vehicle security.

1991

Transit broke new ground again with a major redesign of the underbody structure. It not only improved manufacturing efficiency and thus build quality, but also allowed these models to handle the full force of a 48 km/h (30 mph) barrier crash test. The new underbody design allowed a new 1.5-tonne payload short-wheelbase model, the Transit 150, to be introduced on 15-inch wheels.

Long-wheelbase models changed even more significantly. The 15-inch wheels became standard; the model adopted single rear wheels and switched to an independent front suspension with rack-and-pinion steering.

The 1991 model also introduced a turbocharged diesel engine in Transit. This new derivative of the 2.5-litre DI featured the first-ever use of electronic management on a medium commercial vehicle, and was key to it producing 100 PS and also meeting stringent exhaust emissions standards. A new 80 PS naturally aspirated 2.5-litre DI diesel, which used a ram effect inlet manifold and complemented the existing 70 PS unit, was also introduced.

1994

Ford produced its three-millionth Transit vehicle on September 15, the same month in which another new Transit was introduced. Easily recognisable by its friendly oval shaped grille, this model was the most refined, secure and safest Transit ever built. Sound levels measured at the ear were 5 dB lower than before, representing a dramatic reduction in the perceived noise level of almost 70 per cent.

The security of all van and chassis cab models was significantly improved by a number of specifically designed deterrents including central-locking, a perimeter alarm, double-locking and Ford's electronic, passive anti-theft system. Occupant safety was further improved by the introduction of a full three-point lap and diagonal seatbelt for the front-centre passenger and the availability of driver and dual passenger airbags.

1995

From the spring, the simple lap belts fitted to all rear seats of 12- and 15-seat Transit buses were replaced with three-point, lap and diagonal seatbelts. Driver comfort was improved by a restyled cab interior, featuring new trim materials in lighter, brighter colours, a completely revised dash incorporating a Mondeo-style instrument cluster and new climate control system.

1996

The Transit 17-seat minibus made its debut. It had comfort, plus the highest level of safety of any other of its kind including: three-part inertia reel lap and diagonal seatbelts throughout, tested to passenger car standards, high-backed rear seats with fixed head restraints, driver and outer front passenger airbags fitted as standard, and anti-lock brakes fitted as standard.

1997

Transit went into production at Ford's Hai Dong, Vietnam assembly plant, and the first China-made Transit vehicle is built by JMC in Nanchang, a joint venture operation between Jiangling Motors Co., Ltd. and Ford.

1998

Electronic Brake Force Distribution and Traction Assist were introduced along with an enhanced immobilisation system and improved steering column locking. For the first time, Ford Transits of varying specification were converted to run on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), and an Autoclutch system was introduced with manual gear selection and automatic clutch operation.

2000

After 35 years, the fourth generation all-new Ford Transit was launched. Produced at Ford's Genk Assembly Plant in Belgium, it made its public debut at the RAI 2000 European Road Transport Show in Amsterdam. An industry first with front-wheel drive and rear-wheel drive configurations built on a common platform.

Yet another production milestone – the four-millionth Ford Transit was built.

2001

Formula One-style gear change technology came to the new Ford Transit range with the advanced Durashift EST automated transmission.

The new Transit was voted "International Van of the Year 2001", and also won the prestigious "Arctic Van test" of 2001 held in Lapland and "Parcel Van of the Year 2001" in Germany.

2002

The 4.25-tonne, dual rear-wheel Transit Jumbo was launched at the Amsterdam International Motor Show. Building on the success of the 3.5-tonne Jumbo launched in 2001, the new model offered Transit's best-ever combination of load space and payload.

Ford also unveiled the Transit Connect, a new smaller member of the Transit family offering class-leading load-area flexibility and security as well as low cost of ownership.

Ford's new common-rail turbo-diesel engine, the Duratorq TDCi, became available on the Transit, initially offered as a 2.0-litre 125 PS option on front-wheel drive Transit models.

2003

A new two-tonne low-floor, front-wheel drive model joined the range.

The new Transit Connect was voted "International Van of the Year" for 2003, along with awards in seven individual countries.

Another industry first – anti-locking brake system (ABS) becomes a standard feature.

2004

Production of Ford Transit moved from Genk, Belgium, to the state-of-the-art Ford Otosan plant in Kocaeli, Turkey.

2005

The Ford Transit Connect won the prestigious “Arctic Van test” of 2005, held in Lapland.

Another milestone as the five-millionth Transit was built, and on August 9, 2005, Ford Transit celebrated its 40th birthday.

2006

A new-generation Transit was launched, the Mk5 Transit, with a fresh exterior design and a new cabin offering a dash-mounted gear lever and increased comfort and feature availability. Electronic Stability Programme (ESP) became widely available through the product range, while a new range of engines – six diesels and one petrol, also with CNG and LPG conversions – offered clean and efficient power.

2007

Intelligent All-Wheel Drive was added, making Transit the only Van to offer front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive and all-wheel drive versions on the same platform. ESP was now standardised on all front- and rear-wheel drive models with Duratorq TDCi, and the new Transit SportVan Series was introduced.

The Transit was voted “International Van of the Year 2007”.

2008

The powerful new 3.2-litre Duratorq TDCi with 200 PS and 470 Nm was introduced for high payload rear-wheel drive models.

2009

The fuel-efficient Transit EOnetic was launched. With the optional coated diesel particle filter (cDPF), Transit EOnetic was the first Ford commercial vehicle to achieve Euro Stage V emission levels.

2010

Transit passed the six million production milestone on April 30. In August, Transit had its 45th anniversary.

2011

With the launch of the 2012 Transit, Ford introduced the new global 2.2-litre Duratorq TDCi diesel engine family, offering Euro Stage V emission levels and new fuel-saving technologies including Auto-Start-Stop and switchable speed limiter.

2012

The all-new Transit Custom was launched. This dedicated solution for the one-tonne segment offered new levels of style, safety and load-carrying ability, as well as excellent fuel economy and cost of ownership. This was recognised by the “International Van of the Year 2013” award; the all-new Transit Custom was also the first vehicle in its segment to receive a Euro NCAP 5-star safety rating.

In parallel with the introduction of the Transit Custom, Ford also revealed its full plans for renewing and extending the Ford Transit range with an all-new four model line-up. In addition to the one-tonne Transit Custom, this line-up comprises the all-new two-tonne Transit, the all-new Transit Connect, and taking Transit into the compact van segment for the first time, the all-new Transit Courier.

2013

On June 20, Ford celebrated production of the seven-millionth Transit.

The all-new Transit Connect van went on sale, offering outstanding fuel economy, durability and load-carrying ability, with a choice of two body lengths, payloads up to 1,000 kg, and innovative loadspace features. Engine options include the highly-economical 1.6-litre TDCi diesel, and the award-winning 1.0-litre EcoBoost petrol.

The all-new Transit Connect was voted “International Van of the Year 2014”.

Ford announced the high-roof version of the Transit Custom van, offering 20 per cent more load volume than the low-roof model.

2014

The all-new two-tonne Transit was launched. Flagship of the renewed and expanded Transit range, the new model was developed for sale in six continents, including Europe, North America and other key markets worldwide.

All-new Transit and all-new Transit Connect took a double win against their class rivals in the punishing five-day Arctic Van Test 2014.

Ford launched its first-ever small Transit van, the all-new Transit Courier, targeting small businesses and urban delivery services.

All-new Transit starts production in Kansas City Assembly Plant, marking the first time that Transit is built and sold in the United States. Transit is offered with a revised powertrain line-up for North America, and will eventually replace the best-selling E-Series model.

European production of all-new Transit extended to the full range of bodystyles and variants, including Chassis Cab with Double Cab and extra-long “Super Jumbo” versions, Double Cab-in-Van, Kombi and Kombi Van models, plus versions with the advanced AWD driveline.

2015

The Ford Transit family celebrates its 50th Anniversary on August 9, five decades after the original Transit left the production line in Langley, UK.

Demand for all-new Transit, Transit Custom, Transit Connect and Transit Courier increased by 46,000 to 233,000 vehicles, helping drive Ford to the position of Europe's most popular commercial vehicle brand for the first time in 18 years.

Transit was the best-selling cargo van family globally in 2015, with nearly 400,000 vans registered, based on IHS Markit global new vehicle registration data for calendar year-end 2015.

2016

Updated new Transit and Transit Custom models – powered by an all-new, state-of-the-art 2.0-litre Ford EcoBlue diesel engine – make their global debuts. Both vans introduce advanced new technologies including SYNC 3 connectivity, ¹ Pre-Collision Assist² with Pedestrian Detection, ² and Adaptive Cruise Control. ² A new intelligent AWD system ² is also announced for Transit.

2017

Ford begins trials of Transit Custom plug-in hybrid models in London, UK, designed to reduce local emissions by running solely on electric power for the majority of city trips such as deliveries or maintenance work.

2018

An enhanced version of the Ford Transit Connect is introduced, offering the all-new 1.5-litre EcoBlue diesel engine with sophisticated fuel-injection, turbocharging and emission-control technologies that help improve fuel efficiency by improvement of up to 12 per cent. Ford's multi-award-winning 1.0-litre EcoBoost engine is also available, introducing cylinder deactivation technology to the Transit range for the first time.

The compact Transit Courier also gets an updated powertrain line-up including Ford's fuel-efficient 1.5-litre TDCi diesel engine, 1.0-litre EcoBoost petrol engine and an all-new six-speed manual transmission to replace the previous five-speed offering. Other enhancements for the diesel models include Active Grille Shutter technology.

A new Transit skeletal chassis cab derivative is introduced, providing customers with a versatile low-height platform for a wide variety of body conversions from general delivery and distribution to removals. The skeletal chassis delivers 200 kg weight saving over standard chassis cab for enhanced payload and reduced cost of ownership.

An upgraded two-tonne Ford Transit with increased payload, built-in connectivity and advanced driver technologies, and the production version of the Transit Custom PHEV are both revealed for the first time at the IAA Commercial Vehicle show in Hannover, Germany.

2019

A new 185 PS version of Ford's enhanced 2.0-litre EcoBlue diesel engine makes the Transit Custom Sport van the most powerful to date when it is introduced from mid-2019. The new Transit Connect Sport van also goes on sale with a 120 PS 1.5-litre EcoBlue diesel and six-speed manual transmission – as does the Transit Courier Sport van with its 100 PS 1.5-litre TDCi engine.

The updated two-tonne Transit becomes available to order with up to 80 kg more load-carrying capability. A top-to-bottom programme of weight savings including Ford's first aluminium bonnet

for a commercial vehicle in Europe, a composite bulkhead, and spin-formed wheels developed using advanced computer-aided design (CAD) systems typically employed in the aerospace industry.

The Transit Custom Plug-In Hybrid and EcoBlue Hybrid vans are named International Van of the Year.

2020

Rough-road-capable Transit and Transit Custom Trail, and Transit Custom Active variants are introduced. Trail models feature a new mechanical limited-slip differential on front-wheel drive Transit and Transit Custom variants, and Intelligent All-Wheel Drive on Transit. Active variants support multi-activity lifestyles with additional body cladding and the option of an mLSD for enhanced traction. Transit Connect also gets the Active treatment.

Striking rally-inspired MS-RT Transit Custom and Transit Connect become available to order direct from Ford Transit Centres in selected European markets.

A new 5.0-tonne Transit derivative, offering customers a van or chassis cab rated to 5,000 kg GVM, is introduced.

Enhancements for Transit Connect include a 1.0-tonne payload³ for the first time.

In November, Ford reveals E-Transit⁷ for Europe and North America – an all-electric version of the world's best-selling cargo van – with innovative Pro Power Onboard⁴ that turns it van into a mobile power source. Available in 25 variants of body, length, roof height and Gross Vehicle Mass, with a usable battery capacity of 68 kWh and the choice of 135kW standard motor or a 198kW option for heavy-duty applications.

2021

A new version of its Transit chassis cab offers maximum cargo capacity for 3.5-tonne operators in the expanding 3.5-tonne and the ability to transport up to 10 Euro pallets even with a sleeper pod fitted.

In March, Ford announces that the next generation Ford Transit Custom – including a new all-electric model – will be built by Ford Otosan in Kocaeli, Türkiye.

FORDLive launches – a new connected uptime system designed to help to maximise vehicle uptime by connecting Transit customers, the Transit Centre network and the automaker itself, using real-time vehicle data to individually optimise the productivity of each vehicle.

European customer trials of the new E-Transit get underway in Germany, Norway and the UK.

2022

In February, E-Transit receives a Gold Award from independent vehicle safety authority Euro NCAP for its advanced driver assistance systems, joining the diesel-powered Transit and Transit Custom, which also have earned Gold Award status.

The first E-Transits roll off the production line in April; the first fully-electric full-size Transit, marking a new chapter in Ford commercial vehicles.

Ford Pro is launched – a first-of-its-kind venture providing fully integrated, digital-first solutions to help customers manage their fleets including the Transit line-up.

The all-electric E-Transit Custom is unveiled in May. Beginning production the following year it delivers 337 km driving range,⁵ payload up to 1,011 kg³ and 2,300 kg towing.⁶

2023

The An all-new version of the compact Transit Courier is revealed in April, available for the first time as an all-electric E-Transit Courier. The 1.0-litre EcoBoost petrol and 1.5-litre EcoBlue diesel versions later earn the highest possible platinum safety award from Euro NCAP under stringent new testing protocols – and record the highest ever score: 93 per cent.

Transit and E-Transit are enhanced with 5G connectivity, a standard 12-inch touchscreen and new Delivery Assist² and Upfit Integration System.

Production begins of the all-new Mk2 Transit Custom with a next-generation platform that delivers enhanced load carrying, improved driver comfort and convenience, plus a range of high-efficiency powertrain choices. It is named International Van on of the Year soon after.

2024

The all-new Transit Connect is revealed and introduces a plug-in hybrid powertrain for the first time.

The second all-electric Transit, the E-Transit Custom, is delivered to first customers, meeting the needs of small and medium-sized businesses looking to electrify, supported by Ford Pro services.

A new 89 kWh battery means E-Transit enhanced range goes 28 per cent further – up to 402 km.⁷

In December, enhancements to Transit make it the fourth member of the Transit family to earn a Platinum safety award from independent vehicle safety authority Euro NCAP. The recognition means Ford Pro now offers the highest achievable safety standard across the whole of its new-generation Transit family.

2025

Transit celebrates 60 years of continuous production, while continuing its journey into the future as the thought leader for productivity.

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¹ Don't drive distracted. Use voice operated systems where possible and don't use handheld devices while driving. Some features may be locked out while the vehicle is in gear. Not all SYNC features are compatible with all phones. SYNC screen appearance and functionality may change over time due to software updates.

² Driver-assist features are supplemental and do not replace the driver's attention, judgment and need to control the vehicle. It does not replace safe driving. See Owner's Manual for details and limitations.

³ Max payload varies and is based on accessories and vehicle configuration. See label on doorjamb for carrying capacity of a specific vehicle. Always properly secure cargo.

⁴ See Owner's Manual for important operating instructions.

⁵ Up to 337 km driving range based on full charge of E-Transit Custom. Estimated range using Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure (WLTP). Figures shown are for comparability purposes and should only be compared with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. The actual range may vary due to various factors (e.g. weather conditions, driving style, route profile, vehicle condition, age and condition of the lithium-ion battery).

⁶ When properly equipped. Max towing varies based on cargo, vehicle configuration, accessories and number of passengers.

⁷ Up to 402 km driving range based on full charge of E-Transit with enhanced range option. Estimated range using Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure (WLTP). Figures shown are for comparability purposes and should only be compared with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. The actual range may vary due to various factors (e.g. weather conditions, driving style, route profile, vehicle condition, age and condition of the lithium-ion battery).

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