



THE FACTS	
YDMC FIREFLY SPORT	
PRICE	£11,500 to buy, £20 for 15 minutes at a Young Driver site
POWER	2bhp
0-6MPH	1.9sec
TOP SPEED	7mph (25mph if derestricted)
POWERTRAIN	Twin electric motors with 12V batteries
RANGE	21 miles

Where to go to get your kids behind the wheel

Children who try out the UK-made Firefly Sport may go on to become safer on the road – and are certain to have fun as they learn. Vicky Parrott discovers the joyous appeal of a battery-powered gem

“When is it my turn?” comes the plaintive cry from my six-year-old, Florence. “Soon, Flo, soon,” I say, vaguely, looking at the queue of children and young adults waiting to have a turn at driving around a hangar in Oxfordshire.

We are in the delightfully aged Hangar 113 at Bicester Heritage, a former RAF base that once sheltered Second World War planes such as the Bristol Blenheim bomber and is now a campus for historic motoring and aviation businesses. Today, the increasingly popular Bicester Scramble is being held – a joyous meeting of classic-car enthusiasts – and the site is full of energy.

Even more so at Hangar 113, where Young Driver – a firm that specialises in driving lessons and experiences for those not yet of legal driving age – is holding court over fidgety kids awaiting a go in a dual-controlled Morris Minor, Austin Seven and a modern Vauxhall Corsa.

Young Driver has 70 sites across the country that cater for youngsters, usually aged 11 to 17 years, whether they want to drive for the fun of it, or to reduce the time and money spent on tuition when they are old enough to get their provisional licence and sit their driving test. But one of its vehicles has been specially created for an even younger demographic.

Thanks to the firm’s sister company, Young Driver Motor Cars, children aged from four to 10 can now also have a driving experience, in the Firefly Sport: a 2.1 metre-long electric



▲ Nursery class: the Firefly’s interior; Ian Mulingani, right, of Young Driver Motor Cars, which created the electric vehicle

two-seater that drives and handles just like a real car, at a top speed of 7mph (or a rip-roaring 25mph if it is set up for more experienced drivers). You turn up at one of the Young Driver sites, pay £20, and your littlest mini-me can have a 15-minute drive in safe, controlled conditions.

“I asked a bunch of kids and young adults what cars they would like the Firefly to look like, and they all came back and said ‘Tesla’,” says Ian Mulingani, managing director of Young Driver Motor Cars. “So I asked what they’d like other than Tesla, and most of them said a BMW i8.”



children, and for obvious reasons it is designed to be brilliantly straightforward. One-pedal operation means the driver doesn’t even have to worry about braking: just lift off the accelerator pedal and the car rolls swiftly to a stop.

While the acceleration is enough to delight a youngster, it is moderate enough not to terrify the adult who is most likely accompanying them – plus there is a straightforward button to halt proceedings if the adult feels that an emergency stop is in everyone’s best interests. The Firefly also has a sensor that will automatically stop the car if it detects an imminent collision.

At Bicester, I noticed how Florence’s steering improved within moments. With nothing but small cones to worry about, she initially struggled with correcting the steering input on exiting a corner. But within a lap or two, she had got the hang of that and was starting to get the correct line in and out of a curve. Another lap and she was confident enough to choose her own route, giggling her way around the simple, twin figure-of-eights.

This, if I’m honest, took me by surprise because Flo has never shown great confidence with the occasional junior kart or fairground ride where she has previously had the opportunity to drive, or even just steer, herself. I don’t know whether it was her own growth in confidence, or the perceived safety of the huge, open space in a non-competitive situation – perhaps together with the Firefly Sport’s conventional car appearance – but she couldn’t get enough.

Even better, this is very much a

There is a button to halt proceedings if you feel an emergency stop is in everyone’s best interests

▲ Mini marvel: Vicky’s daughter Florence tries the must-have car for ages four to 10

wholly British endeavour: the Firefly Sport is produced in Kenilworth in Warwickshire, while Young Driver Motor Cars was set up and is run by a team of ex-Jaguar Land Rover, MG and Rover executives. More than that, the Firefly Sport is also almost entirely produced using British parts.

“To be honest, I was told by the Department for Trade that I would manage about 60 per cent parts from the UK, maximum, and I took that as a challenge,” says Mulingani.

“Right now, we’re about 90 per cent British. The two 12-volt batteries [used in the Firefly] are from Aceleron in Bromsgrove, and they are great, as they’re recyclable, or you can even replace individual cells if you need to. The electric motors are from Bournemouth; alloys are from Tipton in Dudley; the body is made in Huddersfield by Victoria Mouldings.

“The tyres and lights are the only thing not British-sourced at the moment, but give me time...”

The company is currently producing two Firefly Sports cars per week in order to fulfil demand at its driver training sites across the country. And just in case you would like a Firefly Sport of your own, you can buy one – for £11,500.

The Firefly Sport and its young fans are the natural evolution of the simple but heartening concept that Young Driver has established over the past decade and more. While the data exists to prove that individuals are likely to become safer, more responsible drivers as a result of having early access to a vehicle, the essence of the Firefly Sport feels more about having fun. It’s straightforward and unthreatening, and undoubtedly educational, but still an absolute thrill for the youngster who gets to have full control of a car.

In Flo’s words: “I really liked it! I like the fact that it’s especially for kids and that I got to drive it myself. When can I drive it again?”



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MOVING UP A GEAR: GROWN-UP ALTERNATIVES TO THE ELECTRIC FIREFLY

Young Driver’s portfolio of activities includes 30- or 60-minute driving lessons for under-17s, identical to those they will experience once they are of legal age to drive on public roads.

Other activities include driving classic cars, off-roading and even having a go in a fire engine. Here are a couple of other vehicles available that they can try. Full details at [youngdriver.eu/](https://www.youngdriver.eu/)



Vauxhall Corsa E (2014-2019)
Along with the Ford Fiesta, the Corsa has become almost a default choice as a first car for youngsters, thanks to them being the mainstay of driving schools – so instantly familiar once you have passed your test. The first-generation Corsa appeared in 1993, with each successive generation growing in size and complexity, but becoming much safer as a result.



Morris Minor (1948-1972)
One of the best-loved British classics, the Minor was designed by Alec Issigonis, who went on to set the template for small cars with the Mini of 1959. The Minor has a friendly face and charm in spades, so there’s no risk of it scaring nervous pupils, while its basic robustness will shrug off ham-fisted driving. The performance won’t be intimidating, either.