

Seat Leon

Featured model: 1.4S



SEAT REGARDS ITSELF AS THE more sporting member of the VW Group's empire, and nothing in its line-up comes any sportier than the entertainingly quick Leon 20-valve Turbo. But there's a nine-model range to this Golf-based hatchback version of the Toledo saloon, and the 1.4S is at the budget end of it – and sporting it isn't.

Still, what it lacks in outright performance, it makes up for in its peppery acceleration in the lower gears, and a willingness to work hard. It also revs smoothly and cruises quietly, except that lowish overall gearing means that it sounds busy at motorway speeds. The sweet-natured 75bhp engine does tend to flag on up-gradients, it's true, but so what? The gearchange is crisp and positive enough to make a downshift – sometimes two for urgent overtaking – no chore. And who can complain at up to 49mpg economy?

The comfortably absorbent suspension not only gives an easy-going ride, but is well-controlled enough to ensure taut, alert handling, further aided by a pleasing immediacy to the fluid steering. The brakes are excellent, too, losing marks only for being too head-noddingly abrupt at low speeds.

Seat height and steering wheel reach and rake adjustments help to tailor a "just right" driving position with good headroom. These are complemented by the handy switchgear (radio controls

excepted) and well-spaced pedals. The narrow rear window and wide pillars mar rearward vision, however.

Only the Leon 1.4S misses out on air conditioning – and a sunroof is extra. Otherwise it's well-specified with convenience and safety items, including driver and passenger front and side airbags plus Isofix child seat mounting points. All three rear passengers have a three-point seatbelt and head restraint.

Headroom and kneeroom back there are reasonable, but the seat itself is a bit short in the cushion and will prove too upright for some. There's an aura of high quality throughout the cabin, let down only by the plasticky door trims.

Raising the tailgate gives access to a carefully trimmed boot that's deep (so it has a high sill) and has a practical boxy shape that can be doubled in volume by folding the divided back seats.

There's a 12-year anti-rust warranty and major servicing is due every 20,000 miles.

VERDICT

It may be just the entry-level Leon, but the 1.4S is an able and amiable companion that rarely puts a wheel wrong. If you are after a soundly built, well-equipped, sporty looking yet practical hatchback at a sensible price, this one must be on your short list.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○○
Fuel economy	★★★★○○
Controls/displays	★★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○○
Safety	★★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1390cc, 4 cylinder. 75bhp at 5000rpm, 94 lb ft at 3300rpm. Belt-driven single OHC, 16 valves. Multi-point petrol injection
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive. 20.1mph/1000rpm in 5th, 16.7 in 4th

suspension front: MacPherson coil spring/damper struts. Rear: twist beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs
steering hydraulic power assisted. 3.1 turns lock to lock, 10.4m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.6m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with standard ABS

wheels/tyres 6in steel with 195/65R15T tyres (alloy wheels with 195/65R15V Firestone Firehawk tyres on test car). Full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

washers wash before wipers wipe
sensibly grouped warning lights
good spread of light on dipped beams
three-position front door checks

hard bar at rear shin level
red lighting to instruments
stiction in hand-adjusted mirrors
high boot sill to negotiate

THE LEON RANGE

body lower-medium, 5-door hatchback
trim levels S, SE, Sport and Cupra
engines petrol: 1.4/75bhp, 1.6/100bhp, 1.8 20v/125bhp, 1.8 20v T/180bhp
diesel: 1.9 TDI/90bhp, 1.9 TDI/110bhp
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (6-speed on 1.8 20v T; 4-speed auto option on 1.6/100bhp petrol)
notable features 9-model range slots in below 4-door Toledo; ABS, four airbags, three 3-point rear seatbelts/head restraints, power steering and air conditioning on most models; 3-year warranty

OVERTAKING ABILITY				★★★★○○	
<i>A smooth, willing sweetie but performance relatively modest. Pulls gamely but at times feels as though 1.6 would be the better bet</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	③ rd gear	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	
20-40mph	4.0	7.3	10.9	14.0	
30-50mph	5.6	7.2	10.6	14.3	
40-60mph	7.3	7.4	11.1	15.2	
50-70mph	9.4	9.1	12.1	16.5	
30-70mph	15.0	16.3	22.7	30.8	
max speed in each gear (*using 5250rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	25	44	66	88	103

SAFETY ★★★★★○	
<i>ABS, four airbags, three 3-point seatbelts (and head restraints) plus Isofix mounts commendable in view of Leon's keen pricing</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
pedal feel ★★☆☆○	pedal load
in emergency ★★★★★○	10kg 31m
handbrake ★★★★★○	24kg 25½m best stop
	+4kg ie 28kg 25½m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Leon not yet tested

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆○			
<i>Roomy up front but less so for back seat occupants – a bar under front seats restricts footroom. Doors can spring back on you, too</i>			
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>	inside	(† without sunroof)	
outside	front - legroom	83-109	
length 418	- headroom	92-100 †	
width - exc mirrors 174	rear - typical leg/	98	
- inc mirrors 197	kneeroom	72	
height 144	- headroom	93	
load sill (inside/outside) 25/73	- hiproom	126	
steering	load space (litres/cu ft)		
turns lock-to-lock 3.1	(all seats in use)	415/14.6	
turning circle 10.4	load length	72-141	
easy to park/garage?	load width	100	
★★☆☆○	load height	56	

SECURITY FEATURES		
central locking ✓	alarm	0
remote control ✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure ✗	luggage security	★★★★○
deadlocks ✓		
✓ standard	0 dealer option	✗ not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★○	
<i>Sporty but not too firm, despite V-rated tyres on 1.4 test car. Communicative steering with compact turning circles aid agility</i>	



COMFORT ★★☆☆○	
<i>Firm, supportive seats complement easily tailored driving position. Absence of air conditioning and sunroof tells in warm weather</i>	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★★○	
<i>Smooth-acting VW-style controls but gearshift can be clingy. Light clutch, clear dials and lots of adjustments pamper driver</i>	
	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆○	
<i>Frugal but no more than you would expect in view of 1.4's performance. Responds well to gentle touch – good tank range, too</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 28½	urban 32.8
best (gentle/rural) 49	extra urban 51.4
overall mpg on test 40	combined 42.8
realistic tank capacity 48 litres	CO ₂ emissions 158g/km
typical range 420 miles	car tax band B

HOW THE LEON COMPARES	engine cyl/cc/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes best stop (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
SEAT LEON 1.4S 5dr	4/1390/75	3495	15.0	30.8/22.7	40	25½/24*	109	98/72	3.1/10.4	418
Citroën Xsara 1.4LX 5dr	4/1360/75	3400	14.0	31.9/22.1	38	29/20	107	99/74	3.2/10.8	417
Daewoo Lanos 1.4SE 5dr	4/1349/75	3190	14.3	39.5/26.3	38½	27/16*	106	96/73	3.0/10.0	408
Mazda 323 1.5LXi 5dr	4/1498/88	3500	12.0	29.1/21.4	38	24½/18*	109	99/74	2.7/11.2	420
Nissan Almera 1.5S 5dr	4/1497/90	3165	12.3	33.1/24.3	39	27½/9½*	107	96/69	2.9/11.0	418
Toyota Corolla 1.4 Liftback	4/1398/95	3540	10.8	28.5/20.6	40½	26½/16*	106	93/68	3.3/10.3	429
* with ABS										