

Seat Arosa

Featured model: 1.4TDi S



THE ONLY REAL DIFFERENCE between the Arosa and VW's Lupo is in equipment, engine availability and the resulting price. Current Arosas all have the firmer suspension settings found on some Lupos, while the 1.4/60bhp petrol version of the Arosa now comes with auto-only transmission. Like the options list, engine choice is wider on the VW – you can't have ABS or air conditioning on this (cheaper) 1.4TDi Arosa, but the price is £1000 lower than for the Lupo equivalent.

What you do get, however, is arguably the best small diesel currently available. It offers tremor-free, low-rev response, plus clatter-free starting and higher-speed cruising ability that makes longer trips no trouble at all.

This impressive mechanical refinement is partly due to the three-pot engine (fewer firing pulses at any speed), but mainly because its contra-rotating balancer shaft prevents the vibes that beset many four-cylinder diesels – including VW's. So we have here an engine that gives identical mpg to the Lupo 1.7SDi, but leaves it behind in both overtaking ability and mechanical manners.

However, the driver must capitalise on this 1.4TDi's willingness to run slowly – at 40mph, for instance, there's an eight per cent mpg advantage in fifth (running at 1500rpm) compared with fourth. A change-up advisory light would be a good idea.

There may be no options available currently, but the S trim now features

handset central locking, seat and wheel adjusters and a driver's airbag. We found ventilation a problem, however, because the facia vents' aim is poor and there are neither hinged rear quarter windows nor a sunroof.

The sheer size of the doors can be a parking problem, but they and the front seats ensure surprisingly easy passage for rear occupants. Provided they're not too lanky, these passengers find their seats comfortable enough, too. Under-seat metalwork robs the one behind the driver of footspace, but kneeroom is improved.

The loftier-than-average front seats support well, making up for the suspension's indifferent response to poorer road surfaces. With the car as a four-seater, luggage space is tight, despite the space-saver-only beneath the load platform.

So is under-bonnet access – this new diesel technology disqualifies any DIY maintenance. However, the 12-year anti-corrosion warranty on the galvanized body and the reassuring crash-test performance strike a positive note.

VERDICT

Designed for town and around, this Arosa will also eat the miles on longer trips without eating into your wallet. Its biggest limitation is interior space – yet up front, no one's seriously complaining. The best bit, however, is the engine.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1422cc, 3-cylinder, diesel; 75bhp at 4000rpm, 144 lb ft at 2200rpm; belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 26.6 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 21.9 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, trailing arms and coil springs

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.0m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.3m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo; no ABS option

wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 185/55R14H tyres (Firestone Firehawk 700 Energy on test car); "space-saver" temporary spare

LIKES ...

really comfortable driving position
tailgate locks with or without remote control handset
front seats 'remember' their settings
wipers concealed when parked

and GRIPES

dearth of trim and lighting at rear
dial markings hard to read
rear wiper blade too long – smears
all-painted bumpers a liability

THE AROSA RANGE

type and size three-door (mid-priced) mini/city hatchback

trim levels standard, S, Sport

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/999cc/50bhp; 4/1390/60; 4/1390/100. diesel: 3/1422/75

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter available on 1.4S)

OVERTAKING ABILITY

★★★★★○

Not only swift but smooth, too, even from low revs. Knife-through-butter gearchange offsets need to change up earlier than on a petrol car

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.6	9.1	15.8		
30-50mph	4.6	6.6	11.9		
40-60mph	5.9	6.6	8.7		
50-70mph	8.1	8.0	9.4		
30-70mph	12.7	14.6	21.3		
max speed in each gear (*using 4100rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	25	42½	63	90	107

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★★○			
<i>This dock-tail treatment compromises luggage rather than rear passenger space. Big doors with a mind of their own, but front seats tilt well out of way. Easy to reverse once rear headrests removed</i>			
<i>in centimetres (3-door mini)</i>		inside	(† with no sunroof)
outside		front	- legroom 84-105
length	355		- headroom 96-102†
width - inc mirrors	182	rear	- typical leg/ 91/
- mirrors folded	166		kneeroom 66
height (no roof bars)	146		- headroom 93
load sill height	20/67		- hiproom 125
(inside/outside)		load space (all seats in use)	
steering		(litres/cu ft)	170/5.9
turns lock-to-lock	2.9	load length	38-94
turning circle (metres)	10.0	full length to fascia	190
easy to park/garage?		load width	95-106
★★★★★○		load height (to shelf/	47/
		to top of aperture)	86

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★★○	
<i>Quite high-set seat with ample adjustments gives good longer-journey comfort. Smooth, precise controls, good pedal layout but displays indistinct and manual mirrors awkward to set</i>	
	

HOW THE AROSA 1.4 TDi COMPARES		engine cyl/cap/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 from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering (p) turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
SEAT AROSA 1.4 TDi		3/999/75	2130	12.7	21.3/14.6	62	26½/18	105	91/66	2.9/10.0	355
VW Lupo 1.7 SDi		4/1716/60	2700	18.3	36.5/26.0	62	26½/18	104	92/65	2.9/9.9	353
Vauxhall Corsa 1.7 TDi		4/1686/75	2850	12.7	22.8/16.3	57½	24/14*	106	95/70	2.9/10.35	382
Ford Fiesta 1.8 TDi		4/1753/75	2880	15.4	28.4/20.0	52½	26/18*	105	93/67	2.8/10.1	383
Fiat Seicento 1.1 SX †		4/1108/54	3150	17.0	37.0/25.5	49½	30/25	103	82/61	3.2/9.0	334
Toyota Yaris 1.0 †		4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
† petrol		*with ABS						(p) all power-assisted			

SAFETY ★★★★★○	
<i>Reassuring crash protection (on Lupo NCAP test), but too-light pedal effort in emergency and absence of ABS make skidding harder to avoid</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ★★★★★○	from 50mph (without ABS)
in emergency ★★○○○○	pedal load distance
handbrake ★★★★★○	10kg 44m
	19kg 26m best stop
	+4kg ie 23kg 32m skidding

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS – VW Lupo			
front impact	75%	side impact	78%
overall	76% ★★★★★○	pedestrian rating	★★★○○○

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★★○	
<i>Latest version has tauter suspension with well judged steering feel; safe and agile, but not in Ka class</i>	
	

COMFORT ★★★★★○	
<i>Gets jittery on poorer roads, but seating helps. Always impressively quiet except for road rumble and when a door glass has to be lowered. Poor ventilation in summer, with no sunroof or air con</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★★★	
<i>Nothing on four wheels (and not many on two!) will better this result at present. So good range despite alarmist low-level lamp. A change-up lamp is also needed – to get drivers to change up earlier</i>	
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	41
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	54
motorway (70mph cruising)	54
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	65½
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	76½
typical mpg overall	62
realistic tank capacity/range	28 litres/380 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	49.6/78.5/64.2
CO ₂ emissions 119g/km	car tax band A