

AA**Car test**

R9766A

See also R9428

November 1997



Seat Ibiza

Featuring 1.9TDi 5-door



What's different?

Intermediate trim level but a highish price.

Reason: VW's 90bhp direct-injection diesel underbonnet – more powerful than any Polo's.

FIRST SEEN IN THE GOLF, VW's direct-injection diesel engine is progressively replacing the indirect-injection "Umwelt" diesel in all VW Group products. The greater efficiency of direct injection means more puff or more parsimony, to order (although the laws of mechanics prohibit the possibility of both at the same time). There's a non-turbocharged, 64bhp version in the Polo saloon, but this Ibiza is the smallest and lightest model so far to host the 90bhp version, complete with turbo and intercooler.

The Ibiza has always felt sporty and willing to be hustled – this latest version loses none of that extrovert flair, with the same taut handling, ideally weighted, alert steering and a firm but non-jarring ride. It's this aspect of its persona that creates the owner-driver's greatest dilemma. Enjoying yourself and covering the ground faster than you're used to, results in compromised fuel economy – that's inevitable.

Restrain yourself, and this small car produces mpg figures that will be in the mid-sixties, without resorting to unreal economy-driving techniques.

It's reasonably quiet, too – you know it's a diesel as it's approaching you, and below 1500rpm (30mph in fourth) there are some vibes lurking in the background for those inside. It's wonderfully long-legged and unruffled, when main road cruising, however, and this same effortlessness shows itself in overtaking, because the real accelerative thrust swings into action below 2000rpm and it's time to change up before the tachometer approaches 4500. The result is really accessible performance to ordinary users, who never need any gear lower than third for normal overtaking. It's a wonderful way too make progress without frenzy.

The five-door Ibiza is much easier to enter and leave than the three-door and this latest version shares the saloon's scooped-out front seat backrests, which make it much better for kneeroom. More front seat travel and the absence of a sunroof, with a seat height adjuster, as well, all add up to provide a good cabin for taller drivers. Lumbar support is adequate for most, and apart from an intrusively positioned interior brake lamp, that scatters light inside and blocks the mirror view rearwards, all round vision is reasonable.

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When serious cargo is to be carried, the Ibiza contends in exemplary style, with a split/fold cushion and backrest, a lined surface on its underside and an easy folding procedure that isn't complicated by dangling seatbelts. There's a highish, painted rear load sill, however, and the rear seat backrest has painted metal facing the cargo, so both are easily scratched.

Smaller oddments are accommodated in a wide variety of receptacles, from lidded facia compartments to a neat pen holder and pocket behind the driver's visor.

Safety and security are sound, but airbags aren't standard, and ABS isn't offered. There are height-adjustable seatbelts at the front (but not the rear), and we don't like the coat hooks' shape and positioning above the rear doors, especially – they could be in line to cause facial injury in a side impact. At the front, under-facia padding and protection at shin level are beyond criticism, however.

The TDi comes with handset-controlled central locking, with a perimeter alarm triggered simultaneously – by handset or keyholes in both front doors. Cleverly, the boot can be key-opened without disturbing the other locks or the alarm.

So, most of the goodies are provided in reasonably generous measure to help justify the TDi's list price – only the absence of a sunroof, let alone air conditioning, strikes a discordant note at the price. Fortunately, the heater works well, giving cooler air from the face vents than those in the footwell, provided you set the heat control carefully.

VERDICT

Nothing about this TDi's looks, or the way it goes down the road with a startling surge of acceleration, could give away its secret agenda – to be the most miserly car you can buy, when it comes to fuel costs. In our carefully conducted tests, it didn't quite make it – there are 60mpg diesels of this size and two years ago, an identically powered pair of Golfs proved 5mpg more economical in all types of use.

However, the Ibiza is the quickest of the bunch, feels great to drive around corners as well as in a straight line and proves highly civilized in the way it shapes up to domestic chores.

If you can manage the initial outlay, we can assure you that this is the small hatchback that will delight you, both on the open road and at the pumps.

Likes . . . and gripes

Heated and folding door mirrors . . .	but adjustment limited on right-hand drive cars
Good wiper sweep . . .	but achieved by different length blades
Dial rheostat . . .	but no facia beam trimmer
Lighting switch now works the right way . . .	but heated rear window too easy to leave on
Attractive "mock" alloy wheel caps . . .	but no bumper or door panel paint protection
Speedo accuracy commendable . . .	but no 30, 50, 70 markings
Heat percolates to rear footwells . . .	but less of it on front passenger's side

