



Skoda Fabia



THIS IS A BRAND NEW MODEL THAT'S ahead of its time. Now who would have thought ten years ago that such an assertion could be ascribed to a Skoda? But it's true, because the VW Group has decided to let its new supermini loose, first of all, bearing the badge of its Czech acolyte. A clever move really, because if there are any rough edges, they can be smoothed away before it's metamorphosed into the next VW Polo in a couple of years or so.

However, armed with this knowledge, plus the fact that the Fabia is coming to market priced a comfortable £1500 or so below the current Polo, shrewd small-hatchback buyers dare not pass by the Skoda showroom.

The Fabia is quite large by current supermini standards – its external dimensions make it bigger than the Polo, Fiesta, 206 and even the Felicia; in fact, the Rover 25 is its direct equivalent. Oddly enough, though, of these, only the Felicia can match the Fabia's interior accommodation for both rear passengers and luggage.

This decision to grow a bit makes a lot of sense in a market where a whole new generation of mini cars, including the Lupo/Arosa, has established a place for itself below the supermini sector that used to be where it all started for the small-hatchback buyer.

It isn't only clever interior packaging that distinguishes the Fabia, however; it's very well built, with tight "shut lines" between panels and impressive torsional rigidity. The all-galvanised bodywork comes with a ten-year anti-rust warranty, in addition to Skoda's comprehensive three-year/45,000-mile free servicing and replacements. But you only have to look inside and see and feel the soft moulded facia (which makes the Fabia look like a mini-Passat) to realise how far Skoda has come.

The model will be launched with two petrol engines and one diesel, but there will be seven to choose from in eighteen months time. The most powerful will be a sporty 125bhp two litre and the smallest a 50bhp one-litre version.

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Performance enthusiasts will deem this Skoda-developed 1.4 to be underpowered, but the rest should take it very seriously as a real value-for-money proposition. The entry-level Classic version has a

The extra £1800 "Comfort" version gets seriously well equipped, with air conditioning, central locking, electric windows and door mirrors, as well as a second airbag and even a trip computer.

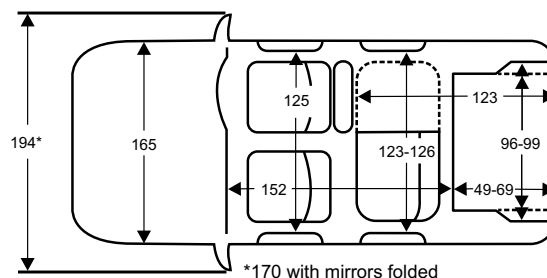
At one time, you had to live with the shortcomings of a Skoda because it was fundamentally sound and very much cheaper than the competition. The Fabia is still excellent value, but there's now nothing to apologise for. When the full range of engines becomes available, it will be even harder to justify preferring a Seat Ibiza or VW Polo.

For families that aren't too big and want to go out together, the Fabia is one of the few smaller hatchbacks that can cope.

Effective heater with rear footwell outlets	...	but too stuffy at head level
Intermittent wipe front and rear	...	but Felicia's clever infinitely variable delay no longer used
Luggage deck and sill well trimmed, with full-size spare	...	but door sills just painted metal
Absence of wind noise	...	but tyre roar more prominent
Wheel reach, rake and seat adjustments on all versions	...	but seat rather firm and Teutonic
"Drive-by-wire" cableless accelerator	...	but there's still engine shunt on the overrun and some delay on hasty take-offs

petrol			Fuel	diesel	
1.0	1.4	1.4 16v	Model	1.9 SDI	1.9 TDI
997cc	1397cc	1390cc	Capacity	1896cc	1896cc
8 valves	OHV	16 valves DOHC	Valves	8 valves	SOHC
sequential multi-point injection			Intake	direct-injection	high pressure DI + turbocharger
50bhp/5000rpm	68 @ 5000	100 @ 6000	Power	64 @ 4000	100 @ 4000
62 lb ft/2750rpm	88 @ 2500	92 @ 4400	Torque	91 @ 1600	176 @ 1900

Five door hatchback



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants