

Skoda Octavia

Featuring 1.6GLXi



THE OCTAVIA HAS BEEN A LONG TIME waiting in the wings, but its late UK debut means that it's "word perfect" from the start. The Felicia has been the model that has transformed Skoda's reputation and the Octavia can only enhance this still further.

Unlike the Felicia, which is a rebodied and refined Favorit and therefore a discrete Czech design, the Octavia is heavily based on the new Golf and Audi A3. Both are more expensive, of course (it will cost £2000 more to buy a Golf 1.6S with air con), yet the Octavia is the longest at the kerb and has by far the biggest luggage space. However, our tape measure reveals that the rear passengers don't get much more room than Felicia generously provides, so anyone serious about contemplating the Octavia as a cut-priced alternative to the Passat or Ford Mondeo might be in for a disappointment in that regard.

They won't be disappointed with its choices of power unit or level of standard equipment, however, which even at the (intermediate) GLXi level is truly generous. The trouble is that the resultant on-the-road prices (basic 1.6LXi excepted) are higher than some traditional Skoda-satisfied loyalists might have hoped.

This LXi's 75bhp engine is really too underpowered, if you're contemplating filling that enormous boot, but

it would be nice to be able to buy the 1.6/100bhp version with less kit and a lower price; we do question whether everyone wants all these gizmos at the value-for-money, "keep-life-simple" end of the family car market. Remember, if it isn't fitted, it won't break.

Although Czech engineers were crushed beneath the weight of a centralized economy for so long, they're no fools and, with the infusion of VW money, this Skoda product is embarrassingly superior to its German counterparts in some respects.

The engine is quieter on the motorway, the handling tauter than the Golf's, and although the ride is slightly harsher, much of this could be mollified by using the 1.6 GLX's standard steel wheels and tyres, instead of the optional extra alloys and V-rated tyres that came with our test car. The diesel engine seems to settle the Octavia over the bumps and make it less troubled, but road rumble remains prominent.

The steering on the diesel is a shade weightier, as well – it felt ideal on our petrol version, except at higher speed, when its lightness from straight-ahead made it feel lifeless. No trouble parking, however – except that over-the-shoulder vision is far from ideal and the hatch lacks a rear wiper.

The estate car has the wiper, but this has difficulty clearing the curved glass and bulky rear quarter panels

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

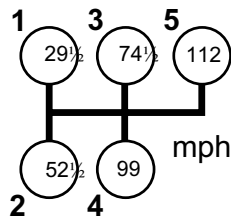
mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.0	4.3	7.6	11.3
IN 5TH GEAR		6.0	11.9	18.3	24.8
IN 4TH GEAR		4.4	8.9	13.6	18.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		12.5/9.2		12.3/9.2	
			11.9/8.9		12.9/9.2

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
		6000*	6000*	5625	

* for best acceleration



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane	
Type of use - air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city - heavy traffic	23
In the country - quiet driving	43
Typical mpg overall	35 1/2
Realistic tank range	45litres/350 miles

(based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience - not nominal tank capacity)

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted transverse four in line. Alloy block and head with five main bearings

Size 81.0x77.4mm = 1595cc

Power 101 bhp at 5600rpm

Torque 107lb ft at 3800rpm

Valves belt-driven single overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets - variable inlet manifold

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with programmed (distributorless) spark timing. Exhaust catalyser and 55-litre tank, with audible and visual low-level warnings

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; front-wheel drive (no automatic option)

Mph per 1000rpm 19.9 in 5th; 16.5 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper struts with integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs and trailing arms. Anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance, 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.5m between kerbs, with 15.7m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J steel with 195/65 R15V Firestone tyres on test car - H-rated tyres standard. Full-size spare

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo and electronic anti-skid and traction controls standard

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Head restraints

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag? ☒

other airbags? ☒

side impact protection ●●●●○

Fuel anti-spillage

☒ standard on test car ☐ factory fitted option ☒ not available

Door locking

central locking? ☒

remote control? ☒

auto window closure? ☒

deadlocks? ☒

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden from view ●●○○○

Alarm

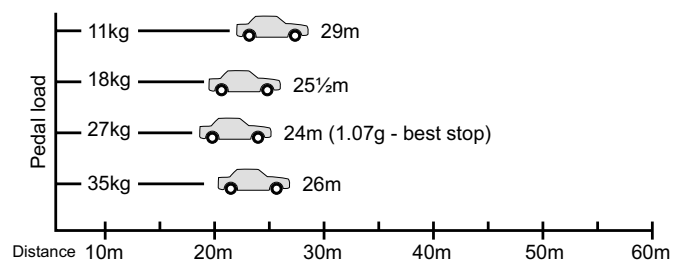
engine immobilised? ☒

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○ Handbrake ●●○○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)

(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



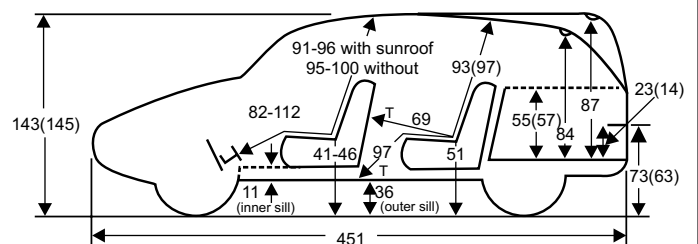
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:

9 1/2 kg at start of test, 12 kg at end of test (Ideal brakes show no change)

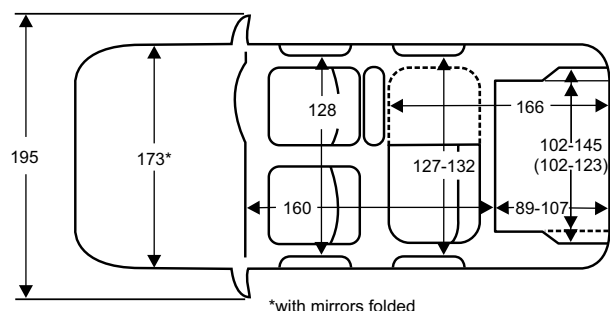
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five door (Estate car in brackets, where different)



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



*with mirrors folded

block the view. This model's main load-carrying advantages are gained by its less steeply angled tailgate, which enhances rear headroom and load height. Nevertheless, the hatch's load deck boasts a massive 22cu ft beneath its load cover; it's a pity that both retain rear load sills, although the estate's is less prominent. Fold the back seat on either and there's even more space for cargo, with the cushions quickly removable, if required, to provide unrestricted room for planks or a roll of carpet right through to the fascia - that's well over 250cm (8ft) long.

The seats support well, if rather unyieldingly and, like the driver, the front passenger enjoys lumbar and cushion height adjustment. It's a pity that the Felicia's infinitely variable intermittent wipe has not been carried over - though there are still stepped variations. The fascia design and quality are most impressive, however, with many bits (such as the stalks and ventilator vents) sensibly borrowed from Audi and VW.

The heater is powerful and will give cooler air at face level to prevent stuffiness, even before the air-conditioner is switched on. We don't see the design sense in preventing it from working on a frosty morning, however - that's when screen demisting is a priority and the glass near the A-pillars doesn't get enough air, in any case.

The Octavia's security doesn't extend to an alarm, but its locking arrangements are both thorough and very congenial to live with. Three keyholes (including the

tailgate's) will lock or unlock everything, with deadlocking if required. It's the same story with safety equipment and the brakes' performance is very impressive, as our table shows.

The other aspect of security is Skoda's after-sales package. Skoda is challenging Daewoo with its recently introduced three-year/45,000-mile free servicing deal, included in the list price; its galvanised body also means a 10-year anti-corrosion guarantee for the Octavia - neither Felicia nor Daewoo can run to that.

VERDICT

With later Favorits and the lower-range Felicias, you got modest but reliable and likeable family transport on the cheap. With the new Octavia, the ownership proposition has shifted discernibly.

If you discount the unconvincingly engined LXi, prospective owners are going to be attracted less by its price, more by its unsurpassed levels of equipment and security in ownership. With Octavia, you're free of unexpected expense for three years, need not be concerned about rust for 10 years, and can be reassured by the fact that it shares its major mechanical components with the likes of Audi and VW.

With one of those family based small Skoda dealerships not too far away, Octavia ownership is likely to prove both enjoyable and reassuring, if no longer bargain-basement.

LIKES AND GRIPES

Air conditioning standard even on GLXi	...	but it won't work on cold, frosty mornings (below 5°C)
Nice pedal action with long, light clutch	...	but left footrest too close for comfort
Powerful heater with even distribution	...	except for missed outer screen areas
Electric door mirrors fold flush	...	but adjuster knob confusing
Lumbar and height adjusters for both front seats	...	but they feel a bit too hard
Audible and visual fuel low level warning	...	but they signal prematurely
Painted bumpers have replaceable nudge strips	...	but outer door sills soil your trousers easily
Full-size spare wheel	...	but it's a back-breaking stretch forward to reach

HOW THE OCTAVIA HATCH COMPARES	Engine cap/power (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)
SKODA OCTAVIA 1.6 GLXi	1595/101	3510	11.3	24.8/18.1	35½	24/27*	112	97/69	3.1/10.5	451
VW Golf 1.6S	1595/100	3540	10.8	23.3/17.3	35	27½/18*	111	95/71	3.1/10.4	415
Vauxhall Astra 1.6 16v LS	1598/100	3440	11.2	23.6/16.3	41½	26/21	108	99/75	3.1/10.4	411
Daewoo Nubira 1.6SE (Estate)	1598/105	3390	11.6	29.2/20.7	32	27½/19*	107	96/76	3.1/10.7	451
Toyota Corolla 1.6	1587/109	3480	10.1	23.8/18.5	38	26/20*	106	93/68	3.2/10.5	427
Citroën Xsara 1.8SX	1761/112	3250	9.7	24.6/15.8	36	25/23*	107	99/74	3.2/10.8	417
						*with ABS		†all power assisted		