

Škoda Fabia Estate



AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○○
Handling/steering	★★★★○○
Comfort	★★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○○

THE FABIA ESTATE RANGE

size and type supermini estate, mid-priced
trim levels Classic, Comfort, Elegance
engines petrol: 4cyl/1.4 litre/75bhp; 4/1.4 16v/100, 4/1.4 16v/75 (auto), plus 4/2.0/115 (due during 2001); diesel: 4/1.9 SDi/64bhp, 4/1.9 TDi/100bhp
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed stepped automatic with torque converter available with 1.4 16v/75bhp only)
notable features ABS (with EDL and ASR), air conditioning and trip computer on Comfort; alarm and key-fob remote for centre-locking on Elegance.

ONCE THE BUTT OF MUCH motoring-related mirth, Skodas are now vastly more attractive, better built and more enjoyable to drive than they used to be. They cost a bit more these days, yet the chirpy, Czech-built cars continue to offer shrewd, down-to-earth motoring at affordable prices.

Hard on the heels of the award-winning hatchback, the Fabia line-up has now been extended with estate car versions.

Compared with the five-door hatch, the estate adds some 26cm to the Fabia's length, plus a UK premium (at the time of writing) of some £700 over the equivalent hatch.

In return, it retains the many well thought-out qualities of the hatchback (already well-documented in earlier reports), augmented by a roomier and elegantly executed estate car tail.

The load bay boasts handy side lockers plus underfloor space for oddments, scuff-resistant floor rails, a large, regular-shaped load area, and a wide, high-lifting tailgate. It not only boosts cargo space by a claimed 60 per cent over the hatch, but is immaculately presented, too.

Powered, in this case, by the lustier (and eminently more desirable) 100bhp TDi version of the Fabia's dual diesel options, the cargo-carrying Czech makes an excellent all-rounder. Apart from mile-stretching 50-60mpg economy, the diesel's extra mass settles the ride and firms up the helm a touch, while the estate car treatment liberates genuine family-sized space, while retaining the hatchback's compact appeal.

Impressive back seat space, comfort and easy folding are replicated in full in the estate, but the centre seat lacks a head restraint and a full, three-point seatbelt. There's the odd minor gripe, here and there, but overall, neat ideas like chilled facia cubbies, "fan-tail" screenwashers, and synchronised door mirror setting are a reminder that the Fabia's bombproof build and innovative, well-honed appeal persist long beyond the initial showroom attraction.



VERDICT

Few cars can genuinely tilt at models from the next size/class up. The Fabia not only does so successfully, but also offers well-equipped, reassuring-to-own family motoring, all at a keen price. With enhanced space and practicality, likeable looks and only a modest price hike over the hatch, the estate further highlights the Fabia's many strengths. A case of "Czech mate" if ever there was one.

VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

length x width (inc mirrors)	422x189
front - legroom	84-109
- headroom (no sunroof)	94-102
rear - typical legroom	100
- typical kneeroom	72
- headroom	95
- hiproom	123-126
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	450/15.8
load length (seats up/folded)	82/152
load width	96-113
load sill height (inside/outside)	16/63
boot/load aperture height	57*/82
<i>*under roll-out load cover</i>	

LIKES ...

durable build and feel throughout
 well-presented facia
 impressive sound system
 TDi's easy pace *plus* 50-60mpg economy
 neat cabin; easy seat folding/removal

and GRIPES

visors "miss" low sun around mirror
 air con tell-tale invisible in daytime
 key-only centre locking via both doors
 stepped, inclined load deck (seats folded)