

Skoda Felicia

Featuring 1.3GLi and 1.6SLX 5-door



THIS REVISED FELICIA IS PROBABLY the last Skoda-designed Skoda. It's essentially a reworked Favorit, but a whole host of detailed changes now culminate in a wider engine choice, a new Octavia-style front grille and all the safety features and conveniences expected of the modern family hatchback. The price has risen, but so has the fit and finish – transforming the butt of jokes to the model that has won the accolade of the J D Power survey this year.

In future, we shall see (as in the new Octavia) a VW Group product jointly developed to replace the Felicia, but for now, it's very interesting to observe how the Cinderella Favorit has blossomed and, apart from a new name, how subtle changes of character have occurred.

Under the bonnet, even the trusty old 1.3-litre all-alloy unit, with its chain-driven camshaft and three-bearing crankshaft, has put on new slippers; with quieter valve gear, it now features multi-point injection plus direct ignition (no distributor or plug leads), and although its 1994-derived 68bhp power peak is unchanged, this and its torque output occur lower down the rev range. Thanks also to lower gearing, it's in-gear acceleration that feels the benefit – over 8sec are carved from the 30–70mph top-gear time, with half that saving in fourth.

If you want more, however (especially through the gears), the 1.6 Polo-engine transplant will oblige, aided by a very slick, much cleaner-acting gearchange on both cars. This 1.6 is the fastest Skoda we've ever put against the stopwatch – but with Octavia around the corner, watch this space!

It's a good job that the gearchange is better, because neither engine feels happy about low-speed pulling (below 1500rpm) these days, although the 1.3's tappets no longer clatter. The engines aren't quite so demure as the legal limit approaches, either, with an even deeper, harsher throb characterising the 1.6's motorway progress.

In poor-surface bump reaction, as well, the Felicia feels more abrupt than the Favorit, but again, the 1.3 comes off best because its power steering is just that bit lighter and less twitchy on bumpy bends – at times, the 1.6's sounds and responses are taut to the point of harshness.

The power-steering is well worth having, even though its turning circle isn't quite so tight as the manual version's. The system feels at its best in the GLi on the open road (the SLX's is too weighty), but manoeuvring effort is fine on both.

Anti-lock brakes come as standard only on the SLX and you'll see that they do improve on the GLi's merely adequate emergency stopping power. However,

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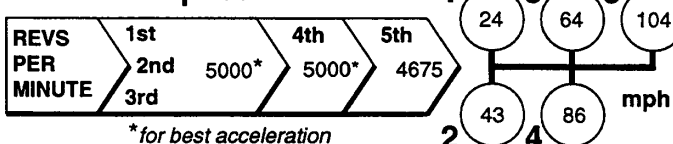
PERFORMANCE – 1.6SLXi

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.9	4.6	7.8	12.4
IN 5TH GEAR		5.7	11.6	18.0	25.2
IN 4TH GEAR		3.9	8.1	12.4	17.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		11.4/7.9		12.3/8.5	
			11.6/8.1		13.6/9.0

Maximum speeds



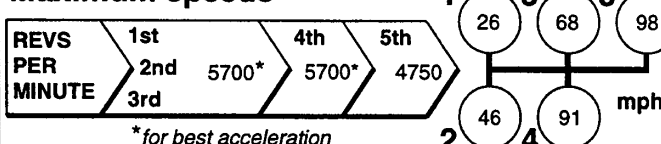
PERFORMANCE – 1.3GLi

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.3	5.6	9.5	15.2
IN 5TH GEAR		7.5	15.3	23.5	33.5
IN 4TH GEAR		4.9	9.9	15.5	21.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		15.8/10.2		16.0/10.6	
			15.3/9.9		18.2/11.7

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.6SLXi

Type of use – air conditioning not available*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	28
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34½
Motorway (70mph cruising)	37
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	42
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	47
Typical mpg overall	39½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	37 litres/325 miles
*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer	

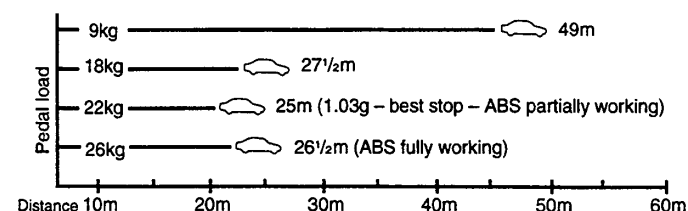
FUEL CONSUMPTION – 1.3GLi

Type of use – air conditioning not available*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	27
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34½
Motorway (70mph cruising)	38
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	42½
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	50½
Typical mpg overall	41
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	37 litres/335 miles
*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer	

BRAKES – 1.6SLXi

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)

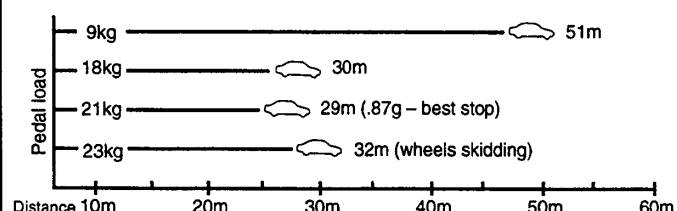


Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
11½kg at start of test, 16kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

BRAKES – 1.3GLi

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

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (no ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
14kg at start of test, 18kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

Seatbelts		Door locking		●●●○○	
front	●●●○○	rear	●●○○○	central locking?	☒
Head restraints				remote control?	☒
front	●●●○○	rear	●●●○○	auto window closure?	☒
Interior				deadlocks?	☒
safety padding	●●●○○	Luggage			
driver's airbag?	☒	secure from interior/hidden			
other airbags (SLXi only)	☒	from view		●●○○○	
side impact protection	●●●○○	Alarm			
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○	engine immobilised?		☒	
☒ standard on test car	☐ factory fitted option	☒ not available			

this ABS system can be "beaten" by a skillful driver stamping less hard – the best systems can't.

Over recent years, Skoda has improved the fit and finish of its products slowly but surely. The benefits of VW's input really began to show in the final Favorit GLX, and Felicia has moved it on. Rattle-free facias, better plastic finishers and properly fitting carpet are more obvious improvements, but more recent details include one double-sided key for all locks (with one-handed tailgate opening), a boot lamp that now works when the tailgate opens, and an air-blending, instantly responsive heater. Cleverly, this also provides ambient air from the screen vents with warmed footwell supplies (to front and rear) at lower heat settings, yet the handbook doesn't point this out.

The fundamental accommodation provided by the Felicia is impressive, as well; the front seats give almost therapeutic spinal support (with height adjustment on the 1.6 versions), while back seat shaping and legroom are remarkably generous.

The way the seat's split backrest and cushion (on GLi and above) fold to reveal impeccably trimmed nether regions is equally impressive and, if required, the cushions can be entirely removed in a trice to open up 213cm (that's 7ft) of uninterrupted load length on the passenger's side – very handy! There's a plastic-protected load sill to contend with and the rear wheelarches intrude, but otherwise, the Felicia is an extremely clever package that offers passenger accommodation similar to Golf-sized cars within external dimensions and with luggage space that are closer to those of a Polo.

Safety enhancements have figured prominently since the Felicia's launch; even the basic version now comes equipped with a driver's airbag plus pretensioning front seatbelts and there are head restraints front and rear. The SLX has another airbag for the passenger – the oddments box that's lost as a result is replaced by a detachable lidded box in the lower fascia centre (whereas our GLi had a ribbed,

open tray). It's also got a posher radio/cassette, but we were reasonably satisfied with our GLi's set.

When comparing prices within the range and with rivals, it's important to remember that Skoda's 1998 prices now include free servicing and routine replacement of consumables, for three years or 45,000 miles – in addition to its three-year/unlimited-mileage warranty. This free servicing must be worth over £700 to even private owners and at present, only Daewoo offers anything like it at the list price.

Like Daewoo, Skoda insurance costs and parts prices are lower than average when the time comes for you to pay for them, and although all modern cars are becoming more complex, the Felicia remains more friendly to the DIY enthusiast than most – in 1.3 or 1.6-litre guise.

VERDICT

The Prices have risen, but so have the quality and generosity of the Felicia's equipment and service package.

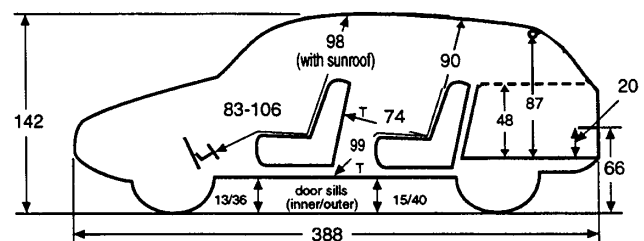
The 1.6's performance is distinctly lively, with fuel economy that remains largely uncompromised – yet even in the more modestly priced 1.6GLXi, we were dissatisfied with the extra price it exacts in terms of noise, vibration and harshness. It tries to be sporty, but doesn't have what it takes.

The 1.3's improvements are more convincing and, although you can save another £1700 on the perfectly adequate 1.3L, the mid-range GLi, complete with desirable power steering, central locking and even electric mirrors, looks like the ideal compromise. It's surely the ultimate bargain as the fully fledged family hatchback at present.

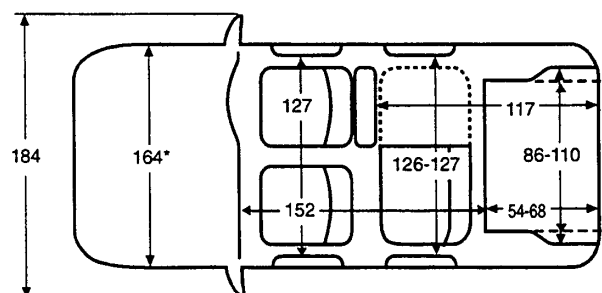
MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Five-door



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



*with mirrors folded

HOW THE FELICIAS COMPARE*	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 FELICIA 1.3	1289/68	3380	15.2	33.5/21.6	41	29/21	106	99/74	3.7/10.5	388
Daewoo Lanos 1.4	1349/75	3190	14.3	39.5/26.3	38½	27/16	106	96/73	3.0/10.0 (p)	408
VW Polo 1.4	1390/60	3180	14.5	29.9/20.4	42	29/16	107	95/67	2.9/10.1 (p)	372
Fiat Punto 60	1242/58	3600	14.4	31.2/21.9	42½	27½/20	105	102/72	4.5/10.2	376
Rover 214i	1396/75	3620	13.6	29.3/19.8	39½	28/16	107	94/66	3.4/10.4 (p)	397
SKODA FELICIA 1.6	1598/75	3150	12.4	25.2/17.1	39½	25/22†	106	99/74	3.1/10.85 (p)	388
* All five-door hatchbacks						† with ABS		(p) power assisted		

Likes ... and gripes

Door nudge-mouldings on all except base version ... but now painted bumpers more vulnerable despite replaceable nudge strips

Clever variable wipe on 1.6 can be added to ... but do change the nasty wiper blades at the same time!
all versions

⚙ New key fits central locking on both front doors ... but no boot security from the interior

You may like the smart new front grille ... but don't hit your head on it with the bonnet open

⚙ Improved gearchange quality with ultra-light ... but don't "ride" the pedal – too easy to promote slip clutch

Even spare wheel is alloy on SLX ... but handy satchel of tools and paint no longer provided

⚙ Accurate speedo/distance recorder with ... sunroof winder stiff to operate
well placed warning lamps

FOR THE TECHNICAL – 1.6 (1.3 in brackets, where different)

ENGINES

Type transverse four in line with iron block and alloy head; five main bearings (all alloy and with three main bearings)

Size 76.5 x 86.9mm = 1598cc (75.5 x 72.0mm = 1289cc)

Power 75bhp at 4500rpm (68bhp at 5000rpm)

Torque 99 lb ft at 3500rpm (79 lb ft at 2600rpm)

Valves belt-driven single overhead camshaft (chain-driven side camshaft) actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets (adjustable pushrods and rockers)

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with spark timing via coil and distributor (distributorless direct ignition – no plug leads). Three-way exhaust catalyser and 42-litre tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual only; front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 22.2 in 5th; 17.2 in 4th (20.7 in 5th; 16.0 in 4th)

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and anti-roll bar on 1.6 only. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with coil springs and an anti-roll bar on hatchbacks. Telescopic dampers all round

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance (not 1.3L/LXi): 3.1 turns between full locks (3.7 on L/LXi). Turning circles average 10.85m between kerbs, with 16.2m circle for one turn of the wheel (18.8m on L/LXi)

Wheels 4½J steel standard on all except SLXi; test cars both fitted with SLXi's 5½J alloys; all use 165/70R13T (Continental Contact) tyres. Full-size spare

Brakes solid discs front, drums rear with vacuum servo; electronic anti-lock control standard on SLXi only