



VW Bora



CALL THE BORA A GOLF WITH A BOOT IF you must, but keep your voice down, VW doesn't like the phrase one bit. But it is – at least as far as most things mechanical go. It does, however, have more of its own identity than many previous badge-engineered cars (remember the unloved Jetta and Vento?), with sportier looks and the sort of trim levels, boot space and inventory of equipment to attract all-important fleet customers – just like the closely-related Seat Toledo, in fact.

VW wants us to see the Bora as a classy mini-Passat; something a bit different from the slightly larger Mondeo and Vectra offerings, and an affordable rival to the BMW 3-Series and Alfa 156. But is it? Well, the ride isn't as smoothly cushioned as a BMW's, although our fears that the tauter suspension set-up (it's firmer than the Golf's) would mean that the Bora was stiff and harsh were unfounded. It does feel a little uncompliant over patchy roads at lower speeds, but for most of the time it insulates and absorbs surface faults admirably.

Likewise, the steering doesn't have anything like the Alfa's informative feedback. Nevertheless, it's delightfully responsive, with a fluid flow between locks

that makes the car a pleasure to hustle along fast, curvy main roads. It's reassuring to have standard traction control on the 2.0 and V5 versions, as well as excellent anti-lock brakes underfoot on all models.

Like the Toledo, the Bora is available with a choice of four engines. Three of them are the same as the Seat's, but the Spaniard's 20-valve 1.8/125bhp motor is replaced by an eight-valve two-litre/115bhp unit. (Something to do with emission regulations and tax relief back home in Germany, we hear.) The others are 1.6/100bhp, 2.3 V5/150bhp and 1.9TDI diesels – 90 and 110bhp.

Familiar old friends, then, and how well they continue to perform in the newcomer. We drove two models on the launch: first the 110bhp TDI – a lovely refined and punchy turbo-diesel this, that's one of our favourites. So flexible, too. It will pull so smoothly (although admittedly slowly) from 1000rpm in fifth, and when you work the free-acting gearchange, there's eager, urgent acceleration from 2000rpm to the red line at 4500. The only downside is that it's quite boomy beyond 3500rpm, but because it's so high geared in top, this isn't a problem

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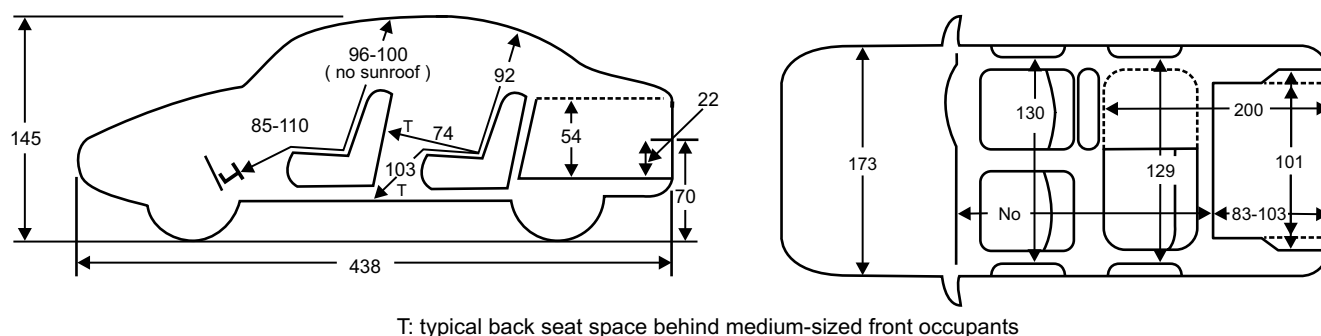
FACTS AND FIGURES

Body style	four-door saloon
Trim levels	S, SE, Sport, V5
Engines	all transversely mounted S/SE : 4cyl, 1595cc/100bhp. 8-valve SOHC, petrol mpi S/SE : 4cyl, 1896cc/90bhp. 8-valve diesel, turbo intercooler SE/Sport : 4cyl, 1896cc/110bhp. 8-valve diesel, turbo intercooler SE/Sport : 4cyl, 1984cc/115bhp. 8-valve SOHC, petrol mpi V5 : 5cyl, 2324cc/150bhp. 10-valve SOHC, petrol mpi
Transmission	five-speed manual with hydraulic clutch and front-wheel drive (four-speed automatic optional with all engines, SE trim and above). Traction control system standard on 2.0 and V5
Suspension - front - rear	MacPherson coil spring/damper struts; anti-roll bar torsion beam axle with coil springs and trailing arms; anti-roll bar
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance
Wheels	S : 6J x 15 steel with 195/65R15 tyres SE : 6½J x 16 steel with 205/55R16 tyres Sport and V5 : 6½J x 16 alloy with 205/65R16 tyres
Brakes	discs front and rear with servo assistance. ABS anti-lock control on all models

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres

Four door saloon



when you're cruising at so relaxed a pace. Expect about 56mpg overall.

If it's performance you're after, the 134mph V5 won't disappoint – VW claims 0-62mph in 9.1sec. It's another superbly tractable engine at low revs, but slip down a cog or two and swift acceleration is on tap, accompanied by a delightfully distinctive off-beat engine note that will please enthusiasts. It doesn't have quite the wonderful warble of Fiat's five-cylinder 2.0HGT, though.

Cabin trim is top class. Everything is neat and uncluttered and beautifully put together – confirmed by the “thunk” of a closing door. Both the well-shaped front seats have height and lumbar support adjustments and the steering wheel is adjustable for both reach and rake, so driver comfort is assured. There's a neat, three-dial instrument pack (backlit in blue) and the switches, which have a quality feel, are high and handy, except for the low-set heater controls.

Even the entry-level S model is well equipped, and to the already comprehensive list, the SE adds traction control, air conditioning, a trip computer and 16in steel wheels (alloys are standard only on the Sport and V5), plus rain-sensing wipers and an auto-dimming rear view mirror. There's also a wide range of optional extras, including a satellite navigation system at a cool £2500! It's an awesome inventory that emphasises the Bora's upmarket ambitions and looks mighty impressive until you realise that the Toledo is better equipped for a good deal less money; you certainly pay for the VW's build quality and image.

Neither kneeroom nor legroom is over-generous for those in the back, who sit fairly upright, but high enough to enjoy reasonable thigh support. Sitting three abreast is decidedly snug, with the centre passenger's feet

straddling the prominent tunnel. Pay £50 extra and he or she will have a three-point seatbelt and a head restraint to match the others, however. Isofix child seat anchorages are installed under the back seats.

Boot space is excellent (it's 40 per cent up on the 23cm-shorter Golf's) and sensibly shaped, too, but there's a prominent sill to negotiate and you have to crouch to push things into the inner depths. If you need even more space, remove the three rear head restraints and unlock the backrests, and the 60/40 split seats lift and fold to provide a long, slightly stepped load area complete with a 12-volt socket and four lashing eyes. Take care not to scratch the fancy brightwork trim or the rear bumper, though.

VERDICT

The Bora has all the makings of a junior BMW – it's that good. It has an impressive set of engines, it rides well and has agile handling and fluid steering. Despite being only adequately accommodating for back seat passengers, the comfortable cabin is a pleasant place to be. And then there's all that boot space.

This car's main problems are its close – indeed exceedingly adjacent – relatives the Skoda Octavia and Seat Toledo. If you buy with your head you'll choose either of these because they represent better value for money: the five-door Skoda has an even bigger boot with easier hatchback accessibility, while the Seat is particularly well equipped. Buy with your heart, however – and be prepared to pay over the odds – and the classier, more upmarket Bora will win the day.

