

VW Golf Estate

Featured model: 1.9TDI (115) SE



WHILE SOME OTHER CAR makers build pretty but impractical "lifestyle" estates, VW goes the "sensible" route. No smoothly rounded rump for this load carrier – it's even stretched 25cm for improved luggage space. Passenger accommodation remains the same as the hatchback's, but the Estate uses bigger rear doors.

Luggage volume below the roller-blind load cover is only 2 cu ft (57 litres) more than in the hatch, but there's a lot of extra height, of course, with the blind stowed. It's easy to load (there's no sill and the tailgate lifts high), it's carefully carpeted and a practical shape. There's more useable space below the neatly propped load deck, too.

Folding the 60/40 divided back seat trebles the load volume for serious cargo-carrying, but annoyingly, the front seats have to be set forward uncomfortably to achieve a flat load floor.

From the seven-engine line-up, we chose the more powerful 1.9 TDI. This turbocharged, direct-injection diesel certainly doesn't disappoint in terms of performance – indeed, from 1600rpm it's off up the road like a startled rabbit. Pity its old trouble remains, though: it's still too coarse and vibrant in the 1500-2000 rev band in a way that puts you off exploiting all that lovely low-speed pulling power. More work is obviously needed on NVH control.

No serious complaints about the fuel consumption, though; it's a struggle to record less than 45mpg and over 60mpg isn't difficult to achieve. The previous 90bhp Golf TDI was more economical, but wasn't as fast or as "clean" as this one. The unusual six-speed gearbox, with its somewhat notchy but precise shift, helps; long-legged top gear has the engine loping along lazily at 2000rpm at 70mph.

Compliant suspension, fluid steering and cornering precision, backed up by traction control and ABS braking, give the Golf Estate a comfortable ride and safe handling.

Generous seat height and steering wheel adjustments, good all-round vision and precise controls make life easy for the driver in the classy, climate-controlled cabin that oozes quality. Passengers are well treated by a comfortable, though not cossetting, back seat. A little more side support would be welcome, however, and kneeroom isn't over-generous.

The Golf has a three-year warranty and this SE Estate comes well equipped, but you can still spend a small fortune on extras.

VERDICT

As if its practical load space, exemplary build quality and superb finish weren't enough, the Golf Estate TDI also boasts effortless motorway cruising and treasury-cheating fuel economy. If only it were a little sweeter at lower revs.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	★★★★○
Fuel economy	★★★○○
Controls/displays	★★○○○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★★○
Space/practicality	★★★★○
Safety	★★★★○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1896cc, 4-cylinder, diesel. 115bhp at 4000rpm, 210 lb ft at 1900rpm. Belt-driven SOHC, 8 valves. Direct injection turbo-diesel with intercooler

transmission 6-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 34.2 mph/1000rpm in 6th, 28.5 in 5th

suspension front: independent damper/ struts, coil springs. Rear: torsion beam trailing arm

steering hydraulic power assistance - 3.1 turns lock to lock; 10.3m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.8m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with ABS, EBD and traction control

wheels/tyres 6in steel with 195/65R15V tyres (alloy wheel option on test car). Full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

extra sun visor above mirror
neat fold-away ignition key
soft-lined oddments pockets
cup holders for four occupants

cheap kick strips on sills
hard bar at rear shin level
speedo calibrated 20, 40, 60 etc
three-point rear centre belt extra

THE GOLF ESTATE RANGE

body lower-medium 5-door estate
trim levels E, S, SE and V5

engines petrol: 1.4/75bhp, 1.6/100bhp, 2.0/115bhp, 2.3/150bhp; diesel: 1.9/68bhp, 1.9/90bhp, 1.9/115bhp

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual (4-speed auto available with 1.6, 2.0, 2.3 and TDI 90), 6-speed manual on TDI 115

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★○						
<i>Surprisingly swift for an oil-burning load carrier. Keep the revs mid-range and there's a rewarding urgency in response</i>						
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear	⑥ th gear		
20-40mph	3.0	9.7	-	-		
30-50mph	4.1	6.4	11.0	18.2		
40-60mph	5.2	6.0	8.3	13.0		
50-70mph	6.2	6.9	7.8	10.8		
30-70mph	10.3	13.3	18.8	29.0		
max speed in each gear (*using 4400 rpm for best acceleration)						
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤	⑥
speed (mph)	25	46	72	99	122	123

SAFETY ★★★★○	
<i>ABS and EBD add extra reassurance to fine braking, but handbrake is weighty. Two front and side airbags are standard</i>	
braking	★★★★○
pedal feel	★★★★○
in emergency	★★★★○
handbrake	★★★○○○
dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>	
pedal load	distance
10kg	37m
26kg	25½m best stop
+4kg ie 30kg	26½m (skidding)

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (5-door hatch)	
front/side impact rating	★★★★☆ overall score 77%
pedestrian safety rating	★★★○○○ test date: May 1998

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○		
<i>Slim wheelarches mean a sensibly boxy load space. It's easy to load, but back seat folding compromises front seat legroom</i>		
<i>in centimetres (5-door estate)</i>	inside	(† without sunroof)
outside	front - legroom	82-109
length	- headroom	94-99†
width - inc mirrors	rear - typical leg/	96
- mirrors folded	kneeroom	72
height (inc roof bars)	- headroom	95
load sill height	- hiproom	129
(inside/outside)	load space (litres/cu ft)	
steering	(all seats in use)	405/14.4
turns lock-to-lock	load length	92-163
turning circle (metres)	load width	100-117
easy to park/garage?	load height (to shelf)	41
★★★★☆	(to top of aperture)	76

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking	✓
remote control	✓
auto window closure	✓
deadlocks	✓
alarm	✓
immobiliser	✓
luggage security	★★★★○
✓ standard	0 factory option * not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○
Feels as though it could handle a lot more power - it can! Grippy, roll-resistant cornering and smooth, responsive steering



COMFORT ★★★★○
Just adequate kneeroom in classy, climate-controlled cabin with good all-round vision. Firm, well-damped ride is never harsh

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★○○○
Main instruments excellent, but trip computer illegible in daylight. Hi-fi and Climatronic controls are too low and too fiddly



FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★☆
Fast and frugal TDI gives a lot of smiles per gallon. Generous, easy-fill tank provides an excellent range between fill-ups

AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 33	urban 39.8
best (gentle/rural) 65	extra urban 62.8
overall mpg on test 51	combined 52.3
realistic tank capacity 48 litres	CO ₂ emissions 146 g/km
typical range 540 miles	car tax band A + £10

HOW THE GOLF TDI ESTATE COMPARES*	engine cap/power (cyl/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
VW GOLF 1.9TDI (115)	4/1896/115	2000	10.3	18.8/13.3§	51	25½/26*	109	96/72	3.1/10.3	440
Citroën 1.8 Multispace†	4/1761/90	3070	12.4	28.1/20.7	33	29/18	109	107/74	3.3/11.1	411
Ford Focus 2.0†	4/1989/130	3125	9.5	24.9/16.7	33	26½/15*	107	100/71	2.9/10.6	444
Honda Civic 1.6 Auto†°	4/1590/106	2860	9.9	na (CVT auto)	38	24½/18*	110	100/72	3.5/10.5	443
Peugeot 306 1.9TD	4/1905/90	2275	12.9	25.2/17.6	43	31/14	104	94/67	3.3/10.9	434
Vauxhall Astra 2.0Di	4/1994/82	2745	12.8	22.1/15.9	51½	26/21	108	95/70	3.1/10.4	429

*all estate cars † petrol ° performance/economy from saloon §29.0 in 6th * with ABS