



VW Golf Estate



What's different?

Estate car treatment adds 25cm to Hatchback's length, with benefits to cargo space. New petrol and diesel versions since launch are sampled here.

THE PREVIOUS GOLF ESTATE WAS A FIRST for the Golf and, like that model, the new version trades more kerb length for improved luggage space. The passenger accommodation remains unaltered in all respects, except that the Estate uses bigger rear doors than the hatchback version. All-round vision is excellent, making reversing easier than in the Bora, for example.

Luggage volume below the roller-blind load cover is only 2 cu ft more than in the hatch, but this doesn't allow for all the extra load height gained when the blind isn't in use. There are also useful spaces for small bits and pieces beneath the load deck, with a neat prop arrangement to facilitate access to this tray and the (full-size) spare

wheel and tools. There's no load sill to lift luggage over and the flat-profile bumper shield's upper surface is fit to rest luggage on, without damage.

For even more serious load carrying, the back seat cushion, as well as the backrest, is asymmetrically divided, to convert into a flat, L-shaped load platform when three occupants are aboard.

From the driving seat, the only clue that you're in a more serious load carrier is that the ride is a shade more turbulent and sharp-edged than in the compliant hatch and saloon.

The version we experienced most was fitted with the latest 115bhp version of VW's much-imitated direct-injection turbo-diesel engine. It certainly doesn't disappoint in terms of accelerator response and will pull lustily from 1600rpm upwards. However, it still tends to be vibrant in such treatment until 2000rpm approaches, in a way that puts you off exploiting all that lovely low-speed pulling power. Again, there's also a harsher edge to its cruising note beyond 70mph, so overall, this Golf diesel is no longer the best available, in terms of noise, vibration and harshness control; the same engine feels better in the Passat.

We have to say, however, that these criticisms may

have been sharpened because of the contrast with both the 115bhp petrol two-litre alternative and, more especially, the latest 2.3-litre version.

This 150bhp V5 flagship model is the most potent and luxurious Golf Estate ever sold in the UK. It's powered by VW's unusual "in-line-V" engine (unique in having only one cylinder head) and has the smoothness and muscular power delivery of the VR6, yet with one cylinder less.

Boasting a high, flat torque curve that peaks at 151 lb ft (90 per cent of which is available from 2300 to 5300rpm), it's a superbly tractable engine at low revs, but change down a gear or two, and by 4000rpm really swift acceleration is on tap. Proving the point, VW claims 0-62mph in 9.4sec and a top speed of 134mph.

But equally pleasing to enthusiasts will be the engine's delightfully distinctive off-beat note; it's not quite as

melodious as Fiat's five-cylinder 2.0HGT on a wide throttle, but a wonderful warble, nevertheless.

Equipment in this top-of-the-shop estate includes fully automatic air conditioning, a Golf GTI sports interior, electric windows, 16in alloys with 205/55 tyres and the option of leather trim and gas discharge headlamps with automatic beam adjustment.

VERDICT

While the new Golf Estate may not have quite the cachet of a BMW Touring or an Audi Avant, its practical load space, exemplary build quality and superb finish have helped it to all but close the gap between these more expensive "lifestyle" load carriers. And with models ranging from the modest 1.4E to the gorgeous 2.3 V5, as well as a choice of four trim and equipment levels, there's a version to suit everyone's needs.

LOAD AREA DIMENSIONS COMPARED

All in centimetres	New Estate	Previous Estate	Current Hatch
Load length - seat in use	88 - 102	90 - 104	60 - 80
- seat folded	165	163	137
Load width	102 - 112	99 - 127	101 - 103
Load height - below cover	42	46	50
- to tailgate top	76	77	83
Sill - inner/outer	0/61	0/61	20/67
External overall length	440	434	415

