



VW Lupo



PUT THEM SIDE BY SIDE AND YOU'LL realise that VW's new baby is closely related to the Seat Arosa, which has been on the market since mid-1977. The front-end styling and fascia are the most obvious differences, but look at the specifications and other variations begin to emerge.

The Lupo's 1.4-litre engine is the Golf 16-valve version that develops 15bhp more than in the 1.4 Arosa, and there's a 100bhp version due later this year.

The 1.0-litre/50bhp petrol and 1.7 60bhp diesel engines are common to both Arosa and Lupo, but waiting in the wings is an extra-special performer – a “three-litre” diesel. In this case, the three-litre bit refers to its claimed fuel economy – 3 litres per 100km or 94mpg to us driving on the left. We won't be seeing this version on British roads for a year or so, however.

The Lupo's new fascia contains a pair of standard airbags on even the cheapest E version and all occupants enjoy head restraints – five if you opt for a low-cost 60/40 split rear backrest, rather than the 50/50 split standard seat – a useful choice if you have three youngsters.

In fact, it's the issue of which items of equipment you prefer to have – or not – which should determine whether Lupo or Arosa is best for you. Lupo prices, model for

model, are nearly £1000 higher, but so is its standard equipment inventory. ABS is much cheaper at £250 extra on any Lupo, whereas the four-speed automatic option is more. Remember that cars with expensive optional extras depreciate more than versions on which they come as standard at the list price.

On the road, you can feel that the 1.0-litre version's suspension and tyres set the car up to concentrate on a pleasantly supple, absorbent ride, whereas the 1.4S (especially on the optional alloy wheels with ultra-low profile tyres) feels tauter, more grippy in cornering, with less roll.

Both still suffer from too-prominent tyre rumble and the engine note becomes more intrusive past 60mph – just like the Arosa's. Maybe the 75bhp version is a bit better in this respect; the higher-gear diesel, on the other hand, clatters around the suburbs, but feels and sounds more at ease out on the open road.

The Lupo's supportive, quite lofty driving position and good seats are all the better for shorter types with standard seat and steering wheel height adjusters. These front seatbacks are more sculptured than the Arosa's, to improve kneeroom behind, and rear passengers enjoy much easier access in the S version, because of an improved front seat tilt arrangement that gets it much

more out of the way. Neither tilt system “forgets” its previous fore-and-aft or rake settings, however. The Lupo S is consequently one of the easiest three-door cars on passengers that we know.

Compared with a Polo or an Ibiza, luggage space suffers more loss than do rear passengers, with a sill to contend with and load length, in particular, reflecting the Lupo’s foreshortened bodywork, compared with the Polo; there’s 19cm difference at the kerb.

VERDICT

To parody the old adage about the curate’s egg, the Lupo is only new in parts. It still displays a greater concentration on pleasing passengers and non-enthusiast drivers with a bit of comfort and consideration. It lacks the handling and the mechanical refinement to compare favourably with the latest Toyota Yaris, Ford’s Ka or Fiat’s Seicento, but then, none of them handles rear passengers so well. Maybe, the best is yet to come...

FACTS AND FIGURES

BODY

Style	three-door hatchback
Length x width	353 x 164cm (+ mirrors)
Trim levels	E, S

ENGINES

	1.0	1.4	1.7 Diesel
Type and size (cc)	999	1390	1716
		- transverse 4 in line -	
Power (bhp/rpm)	50/5000	75/5000	60/4200
Torque (lb ft/rpm)	63/3000	92/3000	84/2200
Valves	8	16	8
		- belt-driven OHC -	
Fuel	multi-point petrol		direct injection,
		injection	non-turbocharged diesel
		- 34-litre tank -	

TRANSMISSION

Type	five-speed manual standard, with optional four-speed automatic with torque converter on 1.4 versions
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CHASSIS

Suspension	front: independent struts with coil springs. Rear: torsion beam with trailing arms and coil springs
Steering	rack and pinion, power assistance standard on all except 1.0E
Wheels	4½in steel with 155/70 13T tyres on 1.0 5½in steel with 175/65R 13T tyres on 1.4 and 1.7D

