



VW Passat 2.5 V6 TDi

— Featuring Tiptronic automatic transmission —



What's different?

Expensive flagship version of Passat combines diesel V6 smoothness with sporty affectations - in this case accompanied by Tiptronic automatic transmission.

THIS PASSAT NOT ONLY FEATURES A Tiptronic automatic gearbox option, which has VW's latest control features, but is married to the remarkably smooth yet powerful V6 diesel used only in Audis until now.

This transmission will do it all for you or, alternatively, act like a super-smooth five-speed manual. On some of the Tiptronic's we've sampled, we've found ourselves confused about which gear we were actually in, but here, a preselector arrangement helps. If you select fifth when pulling away, at 30mph for instance, the 'box "remembers" and actually makes the upchange at 38mph (corresponding to a sensible 1200rpm). Of course, it also downchanges again below a minimum sensible engine speed, to avoid floundering in the wrong gear.

So, in terms of user-friendliness and driver control, this Tiptronic system ensures that you can have it both ways –

but there is a snag. Even Tiptronic doesn't tackle the underlying mechanical losses within this sort of transmission. Although "real-life" acceleration is barely compromised, fuel consumption (the biggest incentive for opting for diesel) most certainly is; we recorded 8mpg better in an Audi A6 six-speed manual – and that model is bigger and 100kg heavier than the Passat. In fairness, we should add that there are fewer losses between manual and automatic with the V6 petrol engine – the higher they climb, the farther they fall.

You still know that you're sitting behind a diesel – especially first thing in the morning, but all those characteristic four-cylinder low-speed vibes are banished by this V6. Its sporty alloys and low-profile tyres do no favours to the Passat's ride, however, and the extra feel in the steering borders on twitchiness at times.

VERDICT

As we've remarked before, the Passat's seats and general demeanour pay less attention to rear passengers' well-being, and shelling out the extra for this flagship version does nothing to remedy this bias.

However, the Passat offers a lot of driver satisfaction and, typical of the brand, has build quality and finish that are a match for its price tag.

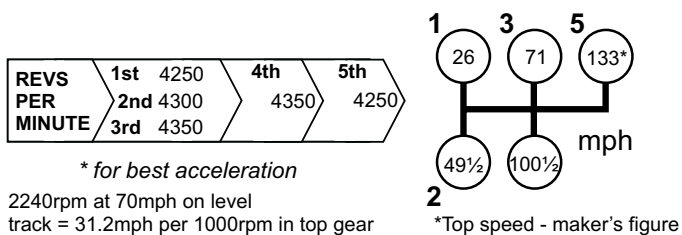
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
IN DRIVE - USING KICKDOWN		1.7	3.7	6.3	9.4
TIPTRONIC IN 4TH GEAR		3.8	7.4	11.1	15.0
TIPTRONIC IN 3RD GEAR		2.5	4.9	7.5	10.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
DRIVE/4TH SPEED RANGES		3.6/No		4.6/7.3	
			3.7/7.4		5.7/7.6

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	23
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	28
Motorway (70mph cruising)	40
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	36
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	40
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	55 litres/435 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2-4% in winter and 4-8% in summer

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Although most automatics have kept to the same basics – fluid converter and epicyclic gears – for several decades, they have become progressively more sophisticated around the edges.

This Passat's transmission is a classic example of current thinking – five ratios, a lock-up clutch to reduce the fluid coupling's wasteful slip, plus a sophisticated electronic brain to control the shifts in a way that suits both the terrain and the driver's mood of the moment.

However, the most recent trend (pioneered by Porsche) is to provide full manual control of the gear steps – Tiptronic, as it's dubbed by VW. The selector lever is moved laterally from Auto to become a fore-and-aft selector, reminiscent of a motorcycle's "positive-stop" foot change – nudge it forward to change up a cog, the other way to downchange. A display within the dial cluster helps you to keep track of the five ratios you've selected.

None of these bolt-on features tackles the fundamental inefficiency of this sort of 'box, however, and it's no secret that Audi will be using a continuously variable transmission of interesting new design by the autumn – we expect other VW Group products to follow suit.

LIKES AND GRIPES

Air conditioning's general performance	...	but more cool air needed at head level in cold weather
Improved radio performance - even on AM	...	but why is it so quiet every time you switch it on?
Reliable displays, including trip computer	...	but auto ratio display could be bolder
Front passenger treated as well as driver	...	but back seat could be cosier
Three-year warranty now	...	but only if you pay the VW dealer to service the car

