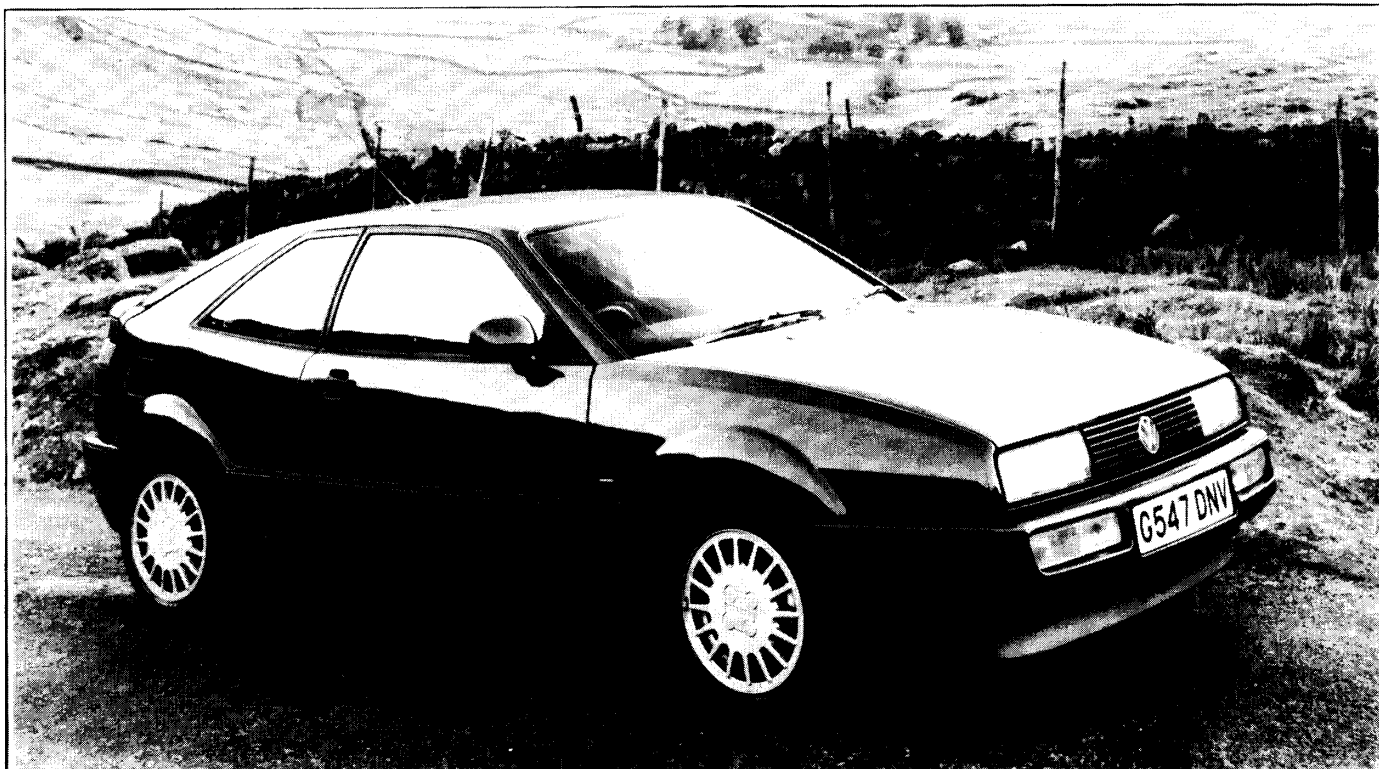


VW Corrado 16V



VOLKSWAGEN'S new, mean-looking sports coupé is clearly designed to replace the Scirocco, although the importer insists that there is no plan imminent to withdraw the older model. The Corrado 16V's mechanicals are an amalgam of components from existing products – the power unit is from the higher-powered Golf GTI and the 'passive-steer' rear suspension is similar to the new Passat's.

However, there is also a supercharged version – the G60 – with an engine unique to the Corrado. As this is even more expensive and offered only in left-hand drive form, we think most serious UK buyers will be more interested in this 136bhp 16V.

It, too, is expensive compared with both Scirocco and Golf Jetta GTI 16-valve models. So what do you get – apart from its striking new body styling?

AT THE WHEEL – driver appeal?

You know the thinking behind the Fiat Tipo and Mazda 121? It's 'build it tall to find more room'. Well, the Corrado is the antithesis of all that. This is a car styled for image and racy elegance, to which its low (46in) roofline is a vital contributor.

For the less agile, it's a long way down when one is getting in, and the heavily side-bolstered front seats don't ease the way, either. They feel really snug and supportive once you're there, however, with rear-of-the-cushion height adjustment and good lumbar thrust – vital with so low a driving position. No lumbar adjuster (or wheel reach/rake resetting) is provided, however, and when you look over your shoulder, it feels rather like sitting in a hip-bath; rear vision is not at all favourable when parking.

All three mirrors and wiper sweeps are good, however, and the tailgate doesn't soil in wet weather, unlike the Golf's. The Corrado's automatic, electric-powered rear spoiler makes it a real conversation point down at the wine-bar – the idea is to aid rear-end stability (by increasing down-pressure at speed) without blocking your view in town. The funny thing is that the factory designed it to erect itself at 75mph – which clearly would be an embarrassment on British motorways, where one could 'pick-off' any illegally-driven Corrado as it raised its tail! So UK cars perform the feat at 45mph instead.

More irritating to us in such a specialist car is that the speedo read high – 35mph at a true 30, for example, and the mpg display on the otherwise valuable trip computer was 10-12 per

cent inaccurate as well. The instruments look attractive and are clear to read, however, and the rocker switches are much easier to find than on some previous VWs. There's a sensible left footrest and the straight-ahead pedals include a lighter clutch than the Golf 16V's, with a slightly 'chunky' but precise gearshift action, too. We occasionally rattled the gear-teeth when going into third, however.

With a tachometer red-lined at 7000rpm and a lovely zestful note from the engine when it's stretched, the Corrado's power unit and image seem ideal for one another. But on the test track, results proved slightly disappointing. With power down by 3bhp compared with the Golf 16V we tested in 1987, acceleration proved a shade slower, too. We again used 6800rpm to get the best times and although its superior aerodynamics give the Corrado a 5mph advantage in top speed, even the 0-100mph acceleration time was a couple of seconds slower. Similarly, our carefully conducted mpg tests revealed a 3 per cent loss of economy. We hasten to add, however, that the Corrado's results are still excellent for this type of car – and very little heavier than a Golf 1.3's in fact.

Not so easily spotted is this 16V's disappointing acceleration in the gears. Because it's so smooth and docile in low-speed trundling, people tend to drive it around at 2000rpm on the tachometer – and expect it to produce the cleanest pair of heels when required, as well. But 16-valve technology doesn't work like that and our speed range times reveal that as the engine speed rises, the acceleration keeps improving. In fact, lazy drivers get better acceleration in an eight-valved Golf GTI – on the right side of 70mph.

On its incredibly low-profiled Conti radials, the Corrado certainly overcomes traditional sports car drivers' reservations about front-wheel drive when it comes to energetic cornering. It's impressive straight line stability is matched by high levels of sheer cornering grip (wet or dry) and a firmly weighted, alert steering response. This powered set-up masks true feel about the state of front tyre grip, but when it reaches its limits, it breaks away with safe progression into understeer under power, reverting to languid tail swing as you back off. It's all very forgiving and progressive, and prevents the driver from being caught unawares.

SPACE AND COMFORT

– popular with passengers?

The Corrado's central locking system embraces the tailgate and fuel filler but the tailgate has a separate, overriding keyhole as well – good. Do read the handbook, though, about the dangers of

leaving the car locked when travelling or with children or pets inside, when parked.

Getting in the back is about as difficult as you might expect but again, once ensconced, two rear passengers don't fare too badly. The sculptured, split/folding back seat takes average-sized adults on short runs, or smaller ones on long journeys, in reasonable comfort. Kneeroom is quite generous, but legroom and headspace can be a problem for lankier types.

Behind, luggage space is fair if you are prepared to opt for the space-saver spare wheel alternative offered at no extra cost – the full-sized (and valuable) spare certainly creates serious load height problems, despite the proper tailgate and adaptable seat backrest-folding provision. There's a load sill, too. Overall, luggage space is about equivalent to a supermini's.

Inside, there's a decent Blaupunkt radio-cassette player, reasonable oddments spaces and Golf-style heating and ventilation. That means no cold air when the heater is on and no rear footwell outlets, but there's good sensitivity to the temperature slide and a quiet fan. Incidentally, we kept opening the ashtray by mistake when seeing to the heater controls. The windscreen washer nozzles and door mirrors are electrically heated, too.

This engine still blots its acoustic copy-book with an unwelcome mid-range resonant hum when cruising at about 2700rpm – 55mph in top gear. All is subdued again before 70mph, however. Tyre noise, though prominent, doesn't get oppressive and wind noise is low, even with our car's optional electric sunroof. With this closed, the sombre interior is rather gloomy at times, but there's no denying the good fit and finish of the plastic and fabrics used.

The Corrado feels rather stiff-limbed at town speeds, but it gets into its stride and proves sufficiently compliant when driven faster, so keeping disinterested passengers reasonably satisfied with the ride.

LIVING WITH THE CORRADO

– how reassuring?

Starting first thing can provoke some initial stumbling, but the Corrado quickly settles into the aimability it shows for the rest of the day. This absence of temperament is particularly noticeable when trundling through heavy traffic – it's very 'user friendly'. Watch the low front spoiler, though – it's easy to 'kerb' it.

The car is equally undemanding at a filling station or when carrying out fluid-level checks. Although the more complicated maintenance procedures are best entrusted to experts, even

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.3	0-60mph 9.3	1/4 mile 17.0
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH GEARS	1.7	3.3	5.9	8.6	
IN 5th GEAR	5.9	12.0	17.6	23.7	
IN 4th GEAR	4.5	8.7	12.9	17.4	

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5th/4th SPEED RANGES	12.2/9.2	11.7/8.4	11.7/8.7		

Maximum speeds

1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
MAX REVS	6800	6800	6800	6200	
*gives best acceleration	53	116	84	129	

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Grade for tests: 4 star/98 octane

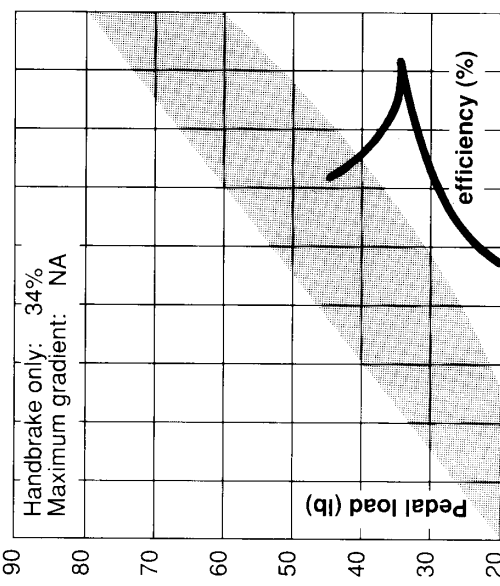
Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	28 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	28 1/2
Motorway – 70mph cruising	37 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	37
Gentle driving – rural roads	41 1/2

Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range*	45 litres/360 miles
*based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience	

SAFETY

Brakes

How pedal loads affect braking



Efficiency expressed as a % of gravity. Ideal braking performance falls within shaded zone – above, too heavy; below, too light

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

22	At start of test
22	After constant use
26	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

Check list

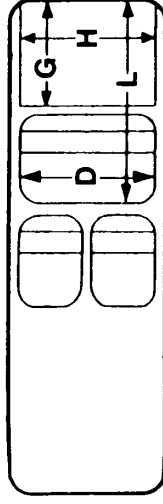
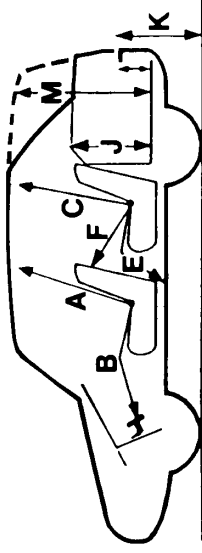
Steering	true 'feel' of road?	☒
Brakes	powerful? sensible effort? fade resistant?	☒ ☒ ☒
Belts	front – effective? convenient? rears – effective? convenient?	☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
Head restraints	front – effective? rear – effective?	☒ ☒
Interior	thoroughly padded?	☒
Fuel	shielded filler? protected tank?	☒ ☒

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Outside

Kerb weight	22cwt	Overall length	13ft 3 1/2 in
Overall width	5ft 6in*	Overall height	4ft 2in
Wheelbase	8ft 1 1/2 in		

*with mirrors folded



Inside

A Front headroom	34 1/2-37	G Load length	28
B Front legroom (min - max)	34-43 1/2	H Load floor width (min - max)	37-52
C Rear headroom	33 1/2	J Load height	15-17
D Rear seat width (between armrests)	45	K Sill height (inner/outer)	8 1/2-12/30
E Typical rear legroom*	35 1/2	L Load length	52
F Typical rear kneeroom*	26 1/2	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	30

Typical represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

here the servicing frequency follows the same 20,000-mile (or 12-month) interval common to all VWs – with an oil change at half-time.

With a three-year surface paint warranty and a six-year (no small-print exclusions) cover against serious rust, here is a sports car that is as reassuring to live with and to maintain as a family hatchback.

In value-for-money terms, the Corrado is much less convincing, despite the foregoing comments. For example, anti-lock brakes ought to be fitted as standard on a car of this character and price. Our car was not so endowed and its over-eager servo emphasised this deficiency, making it too easy to skid in a panic situation. A pity, because the brakes are otherwise very powerful and consistent, with an excellent emergency stop of 85ft from 50-0mph, recorded by using driver-skill – that's nigh-on 1.0g.

Interior safety padding is well done and all four belts are easy to locate in their centre clasps, with shoulder-height adjusters for the front ones. Under the rear centre armrests is a neatly stowed first-aid kit and there's an accident-warning triangle behind the backrest.

VERDICT

It's nice to meet a sports car these days that's not Japanese. Perhaps we can forgive VW for not producing a soft-top, but charging an extra £600 for a sunroof seems a bit thick!

In terms of sheer cornering power and those more subtle aspects of driver rapport, the Corrado proves a very satisfying enthusiast's car. It has the sounds and responses to keep keen drivers happy, and it takes a stopwatch to confirm that it doesn't actually deliver as much straight-line performance as its Golf GTI stablemate. Nevertheless, with its price differential in mind, this has to be a disappointment.

So, this eye-catcher just about copes with domesticity, exudes traditional VW reassurance in day-to-day living and cuts a dash in convincing style on the open road.

Unfortunately, it also cuts a sizeable hole in the buyer's pocket, that only the besotted could really justify.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 81.0mm bore x 86.4mm stroke = 1781cc. Iron block and alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 10.0:1

Valve gear twin overhead camshafts (driven by toothed belt) actuating 4 valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system electronic multi-point fuel injection fed from 55-litre (12-gallon) tank – no low-level lamp. Fuel required: 4 star/98 octane minimum – leaded or unleaded

Ignition system breakerless distributor and coil

Maximum power (DIN net) 136bhp at 5200rpm

Maximum torque (DIN net) 119 lb ft at 4800rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 9in diaphragm-spring, dry plate; hydraulically operated. Pedal load/travel: 28 lb/5 1/4 in

Gearbox 5-speed (all synchromesh) and reverse. Ratios: first 3.78, second 2.10, third 1.34, fourth 0.97, top 0.80 and reverse 3.80:1

Final drive 3.94:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 20.84 in top, 17.07 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3360 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam dead axle with trailing arms and coil springs. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3 1/4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 33 1/2 ft between kerbs, with 53 ft for one turn of wheel

Wheels 6J alloy with 185/55 R15V radials and full-sized spare (Continental Sport Contact on test car)

Brakes 10in ventilated discs front, 10in plain discs rear with vacuum servo

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Maximum speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/ circle (ft)	Overall length (ft/in)
VW Corrado 16V	1781/136	129	8.6	23.7/17.4	36	102/35	43 1/2	35 1/2/26 1/2	3 1/4/33 1/2 (p)	13' 3 1/2"
Honda Prelude 2.0i 16 4WS	1958/148	129	8.1	22.4/16.7	33	*86/60+	45 1/2	34 1/4/25 1/2	2 3/4/32 1/2 (p)	14' 7 1/2"
Volvo 480 ES *	1721/107	114	9.4	22.9/15.9	32	105/40	41 1/2	36 1/2/27	3/33 1/2 (p)	13' 11 1/2"
Toyota MR2	1587/122	120	9.0	21.8/16.8	33 1/2	100/60	43	nil	3 1/4/33	12' 10 1/2"
VW Golf GTI 16V	1781/139	124	7.9	20.8/15.1	37	102/60	41 3/4	38/29	3 3/4/33 1/2	13' 1"

* Turbo not yet tested

*with ABS

(p) = power assisted