

VW Passat

Featured model: 1.8T Sport



WITH A HOST OF TALENTED newcomers appearing on the larger-family-car-cum-repmobile scene, this was no time for the current four-year-old Passat to be sitting on its well-deserved laurels. So it didn't.

Now there's a new model – or at least a much made-over one – to square up to Mondeo, C5, Laguna II et al. It's longer, stronger and boasts a new nose and a revised tail. Under the bonnet there's a selection of no less than seven engines, three of them new.

Our choice this time was the light-pressure turbocharged 1.8-litre power unit that, as its 150bhp suggests, is the sporty choice within the range. But it's not only entertainingly quick, it's wonderfully refined with it. Whether you want a smooth thrust-in-the-back sprint to seventy, or just an amble along the lanes, it's happy to oblige. Complementing it is an exemplary gearchange. If there's a better power train out there, we'd love to meet it.

Because of this Sport model's lower, stiffer suspension and 55-Series tyres, we expected a hard, thumpy ride. Not a bit of it – well, perhaps just a bit of it, on broken surfaces. Otherwise the suspension is comfortably compliant with taut undertones; it suits this model very well.

It also aids the car's handling, of course. Feeling subtly sporty, the Passat can be cornered hard and fast with well-controlled roll and tenacious grip, with the sensibly geared steering feeling smooth and responsive to the touch. The

brakes are first rate, though not entirely fade-free.

Both shapely and supportive Sport front seats have generous height and lumbar adjustments, and the steering wheel can be altered for rake and reach. You can also heel and toe and there's a useful footrest. The result is a first-rate driving position with good all-round vision. Only the buttons for the audio and excellent Climatronic climate control systems call for an eyes-down peer.

In the back there's plenty of room in all directions, but there's a "sit up, no slouching" feel to the firm seat which, unusually, exerts an excess of thigh support.

It's very easy to convert the big, regular-shaped boot to an even bigger load area, but only the lockable backrests fold forward, so the deck slopes up at the front. Still, it's remarkably good for a saloon.

VERDICT

Some rivals can outshine the Passat in terms of sheer spaciousness, comfort or techno-wizardry, but many of them would kill for its superb 1.8T engine. It's the outstanding feature of this sporty, taut-handling and roomy all-rounder. And the clincher for many buyers will be that, with the Passat, you get the build quality, finish and engineering integrity of an Audi at more competitive VW prices.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1781cc, 4-cylinder in line, petrol; 150bhp at 5700rpm, 155 lb ft at 1750rpm; belt-driven double overhead camshafts, 20 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 22.9 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 18.7 in 4th

suspension (lowered by 20mm on Sport) front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs, anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs

steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns lock-to-lock; 11.0m diameter turning circle between kerbs (15.4m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with standard electronic anti-lock and brake force distribution controls

wheels/tyres 7in alloy with 205/55R16W tyres (Goodyear Eagle Touring on test car); full-size (steel) spare

LIKES ...

fit and finish as immaculate as ever
separate stowage slot for handbook
"clean hands" bonnet opening pull
puddle lights in the doors

and GRIPES

back shelf reflects light into window
prominent rear side sills
no sill-guards to protect paintwork
underseat gubbins mar rear foot space

THE PASSAT RANGE

size and type upper medium (mid-priced) saloon and estate car

trim levels S, SE, Sport, V-range

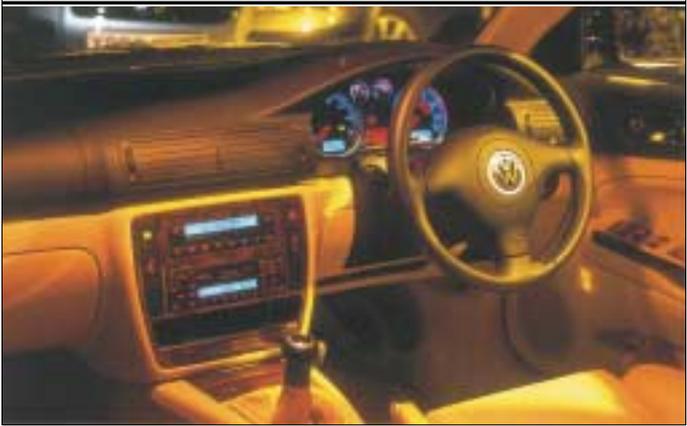
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/2.0 litre/115bhp, 4/1.8T/150, V5/2.3/170, V6/2.8/193(4WD); diesel: 4/1.9/100, 4/1.9/130, V6/2.5/150

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual, but 6-speed on 1.9TDI Sport and V6 TDI (4- and 5-speed stepped automatic optional, some with Tiptronic)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★☆					
<i>Best-in-class "four" with a thrust of turbocharged torque from just 2000rpm that makes overtaking effortless. A great engine: exhilaratingly fast, but also flexible and quiet when cruising</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	2.7	10.0	13.8		
30-50mph	3.3	7.3	10.8		
40-60mph	4.2	7.2	9.4		
50-70mph	5.1	7.7	10.0		
30-70mph	8.4	15.0	20.8		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	31	53	81	113	136

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★○				
<i>Not the most spacious of upper-mediums, but generously roomy, even so. Good rear knee and legroom, but big centre tunnel intrudes. Huge boot plus long load deck when rear seat backrests folded</i>				
<i>in centimetres (Sport saloon)</i>		inside	† without sunroof	
outside		front - legroom	84-110	
length	470	- headroom	96-102†	
width - inc mirrors	190	rear - typical leg/	101/	
- mirrors folded	175	kneeroom	74	
height (no roof bars)	144	- headroom	93	
load sill height	18/68	- hiproom	131	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>		load space (all seats in use)		
steering		(litres/cu ft)	620/21.9	
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	load length	99/181	
turning circle (metres)	11.0	full length to fascia	276	
easy to park/garage?		load width	100-137	
	★★★★○	load height (to shelf)	51	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○
Superb gearchange and quality feel to controls. Blue dial lighting not to all tastes and fuel computer's red digits hard to read. Auto-wipers are not ideal, but all-round vision good; parking is undemanding



SAFETY ★★★○○	
<i>No curtain airbags or rear 3-point centre belt (extra); otherwise decent tally of equipment. Excellent brakes, but NCAP crash test results no match for exemplary Laguna's. Good anti-theft measures</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>
pedal feel	★★★★○
in emergency	★★★○○
handbrake	★★★★○
	pedal load distance
	unhurried 10kg 29m
	sudden 14kg 26m best stop
	+4kg ie 18kg 26m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS (tested 2001)			
front impact	75%	side impact	89%
overall	82% ★★★★★○	pedestrian rating	★★★○○

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○
Sport option eliminates a certain vagueness in well-weighted steering; little road feel, though. Firmer, lower suspension gives chuckable fast cornering, too, with diff lock improving traction



COMFORT ★★★○○○
Sportier ride puts paid to damper float, but means firmer bump reaction – it's not overly harsh, though. Comfortable seating up front, less cosy at rear. Quiet cruising and excellent automatic air conditioning

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○
Our overall 34mpg not a bad result – exploiting that acceleration will cost ya, but it's worth it. About 40mpg possible if you're gentle. Easy filler and fair range. Group 14 insurance, highest tax band

AA test results (mpg)		official figures (mpg)	
worst (hard/urban)	24	urban	24.6
best (gentle/rural)	41	extra urban	43.5
overall mpg on test	34	combined	34.0
realistic tank capacity	54 litres	CO ₂ emissions	199g/km
typical range	400 miles	car tax band	D

HOW THE PASSAT 1.8T COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (no/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 PASSAT 1.8T SPORT	4/1781/150	3060	8.4	20.8/15.0	34	26/14	110	101/74	2.8/11.0	470
Alfa Romeo 156 2.0	4/1970/155	3310	7.8	22.6/15.7	31	26/22	106	95/76	2.2/11.4	443
Citroën C5 1.8	4/1749/117	3210	10.9	26.9/20.9	37½	26½/22	108	99/77	3.2/10.65	462
Ford Mondeo 1.8	4/1798/125	3170	9.8	27.4/18.9	36½	25/19	111	108/84	2.8/11.3	473
Honda Accord 1.8	4/1850/136	3380	10.2	26.2/18.9	32	26½/15	109	100/73	3.1/11.1	459
Nissan Primera 2.0 (auto)	4/1998/140	2600	9.1	auto	32½	24/14	107	99/74	2.7/12.3	452
Renault Laguna II 1.8 16v	4/1783/123	3370	11.2	26.1/19.0	37	25/12	110	97/71	3.2/10.9	458

* all with ABS † all power assisted