

**TEST
EXTRA**

VW Passat Estate

Featuring 1.8S 20v



What's different?

Estate car body adds holdall versatility to VW's superbly crafted family saloon. Power provided by same comprehensive engine line-up.

ALTHOUGH NEVER REALLY LAUDED FOR its looks, the previous Passat was a safe, solid and well-built workhorse. The estate version grabbed the lion's share of sales, so when the new, fifth-generation Passat saloon broke cover at the beginning of 1997, we were naturally keen to sample the estate version that followed later in the year.

Good though its followers thought it was, the previous estate wasn't the most spacious cargo-eater. It's no big surprise, therefore, that the new Passat "wagon" is not only a bit bigger all round, but sports some extra cubic feet where it matters – behind its big, high-lifting tailgate.

The estate's mechanical make-up largely mirrors the saloon's. This means five petrol engines, ranging from a 100bhp 1.6 to the 2.8-litre V6 Syncro's 193bhp, supported by 90 and 110bhp TDi diesel's, with equipment sprinkled on by S, SE and Sport trim levels. With options such as a five-speed Tiptronic

automatic, the Syncro's all-wheel drive, plus Xenon gas discharge headlamps, a satellite navigation system and wood, leather and alloy wheels galore, it was tempting to go for the full Monty. Instead, we picked the bottom end of the price list, opting for the least expensive S trim level, powered by the second-up 1.8 20-valve engine.

With power units now mounted lengthways (catering for the Syncro set-up), the 1.8 delivers a hearty 125bhp, courtesy of all those valves, variable inlet manifold geometry and variable valve timing. The 1.8 is also available with a small, light pressure turbo, when power jumps to 150bhp – the same output produced by VW's novel 2.3-litre five-cylinder VR5 motor.

Even without the estate's 40-50kg excess baggage, the sturdy Passat is no lightweight, but shortish gearing and a broad band of pulling power keep it fairly lively on its feet. Given its head, the estate reels off 30-70mph in a respectably brisk 11sec, pressing on to 124mph flat out. It pays not to let the revs drop too low in the higher gears, though; the 1.8 is perky enough, but it can't match the 110TDi's get-on-with-it unflappability with the gearstick left alone, or the oil-burner's impressively tranquil cruising.

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.9	4.1	7.2	10.9
IN 5TH GEAR		6.9	13.0	19.1	26.2
IN 4TH GEAR		4.8	9.1	13.9	19.1

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		14.1/9.9		12.2/9.1	
			13.0/9.1		13.2/10.0

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
		6500*		6500	5980	
	30		52		79	124
			110			

*for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Fuel grade: unleaded Premium, 95 octane

Type of use – air conditioning off*	mpg
In the city – heavy traffic	22
In the country – quiet driving	43
Typical mpg overall	31

Realistic tank range 53 litres/360 miles

(based on fuel gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience – not nominal tank capacity)

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

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, longitudinal cylinder in line. Iron block and alloy head; five main bearings

Size 81.0 x 86.4mm = 1781cc

Power 125bhp at 5800rpm

Torque 124 lb ft at 3500rpm

Valves twin overhead camshafts actuating five valves per cylinder; variable valve timing and variable intake geometry

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point petrol injection integrated with distributorless ignition. 62-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual; front-wheel drive (four speed automatic option on 1.8 20v)

Mph per 1000rpm 20.9 in 5th, 17.0 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by coil spring damper/struts, four lateral links, and anti-roll bar.

Rear: twisting beam axle with trailing arms and coil springs. Telescopic dampers front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 2.8 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.9m between kerbs, with 15.7m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J steel with 195/65R15 tyres; full-size spare. Optional 7J alloy (including spare) on test car with 205/60R15 91V tyres (Michelin Pilot HX MXV-3A)

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with vacuum servo and standard electronic anti-lock control

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

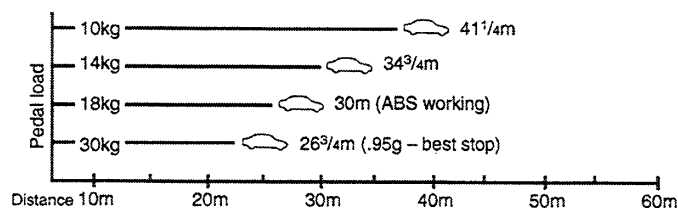
Seatbelts	front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○	Door locking	●●●●○
Head restraints	front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○	central locking?	✓
Interior		remote control? *	○
safety padding	●●●●●	auto window closure?	✓
driver's airbag?	✓	deadlocks?	✓
other airbags?	✓	*option on 'S', standard on all other models	
side impact protection	●●●●○	Luggage	
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●●○	secure from interior/hidden from view	●●●●○
		Alarm *	●●●●○
		*option on 'S', standard on all other models engine immobilised?	✓
✓ standard on test car	○ factory fitted option	✗ not available	

Euro NCAP crash test results – front and side impact rating ♦♦♦♦♦
(saloon version) – pedestrian test rating ♦♦♦♦♦

BRAKES

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●○ Handbrake ●●●●○

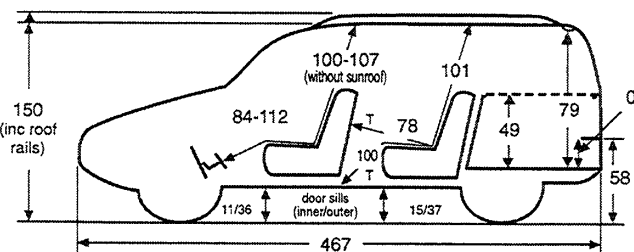
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



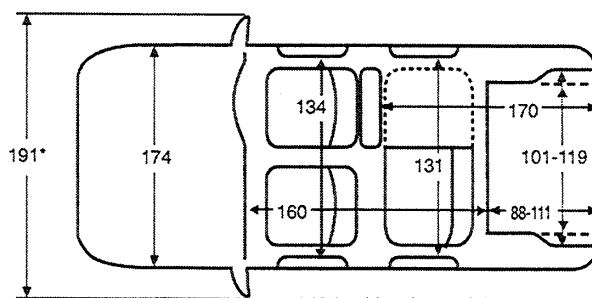
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
13kg at start of test, 20kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres Five-door estate



T: typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants



*170 with mirrors folded

Not surprisingly, it's a similar story at the fuel pumps. Our 31mpg average isn't too shabby for a bulky, hard-worked family estate, but it's some way short of the impressive 53 miles the TDi saloon stretches from each gallon. Disappointingly, our test car's optional trip computer proved more flattering this time around, while the estate delivers a slightly below-par 360-mile range between fill-ups – little over half the distance the diesel's impressive thrift takes it.

Inside, the Passat cabin is thoughtfully well designed and immaculately assembled. Highlights include classy chrome door handles, stylish blue back-lighting for the dials, handy twin cup holders that flip out from the dash, and an easy, pump-action lever to raise and lower the driver's seat. Bumps and bends are mopped up in a reasonably deft and dignified manner, but the ride occasionally loses composure over potholes and, although responsive and nicely weighted, the steering provides little real feel as to what the front tyres are up to.

The back seat – 60/40 split-folding on all versions – is contoured to support in all the right places. Like the saloon's, it feels hard and unyielding to sit on at first, but retains its comfort and support on longer journeys. There's stacks of headroom front and rear, especially when no sunroof is specified, but even though legroom isn't quite as generous as on the previous model, there's still plenty to go round. There's a centre folding armrest, seatbelts that stay out of the way when folding the seats, and the seatback release catches helpfully show red tags if they aren't latched securely. Less impressive is a wide "transmission tunnel" that forces "piggy in the middle" to sit with his or her feet splayed either side of it. A lap and diagonal seatbelt and head restraint is available for the middle seat, but only via the options list.

Moving rearwards, not only is the load area completely flat and usefully bigger than its predecessor's, it's beautifully trimmed and presented, too. Neat chrome tie-down hooks are provided for restraining unruly loads, and rubber strips protect the load deck carpet, while a pair of neat lockers either side of the load area house the first-aid kit and warning triangle, or an optional CD autochanger.

The load height is usefully improved over the previous model (only a Vectra or the likes of a Megane Scenic offers more room beneath the tailgate hinge), and there's more depth beneath the roller-blind load cover when you want to keep valuables out of sight. There's also a full-size spare wheel stowed under the floor (complete with handy rod to keep its sturdy cover propped open), while neat touches like the smart stainless steel sill finisher, plastic-coated top bumper surface and stout twin handgrips inside the tailgate show VW's impressive attention to small details.

Supporting impressive build quality, all VWs now come with a three-year, unlimited-mileage mechanical warranty (second and third years operated by the dealer), and standard-setting 11-year anti-perforation cover for its galvanised body. All engines – even the TDi diesels – require servicing at only 10,000-mile (or once a year) intervals, while VW claims that parts for the new Passat (including items such as a catalytic converter, radiator, bonnet panel and a cambelt) will cost around a third less than for the previous model. Insurance shouldn't prove too pricey; the 1.8 estate earns a fairly respectable group 11 rating (the same as the TDi diesels), with other models ranging from the 1.6's group 9 up to the V6 Syncro's steepish group 17.

VERDICT

The Passat doesn't quite match a Mondeo or a Peugeot 406 for sheer dynamic dexterity, but its cosseting cabin, beautiful build, safe and solid spaciousness and exemplary refinement have the competition comfortably licked in most other respects.

The estate isn't only significantly more stylish and spacious than the model it replaces, it's a convincing and highly desirable load-carrier in its own right. In 1.8 form, at least, it's not especially eager, endearing or economical – look to the frisky but incredibly frugal 110TDi diesel, for that – but if shifting loads is your bag, we can't think of many more satisfying or dependable candidates than a Passat to use for going about it.

It may lack the cachet of four interlocking rings or a three-pointed star on its bonnet, but then the Passat isn't equipped with the inflated price tags of the models that bear them, either.

HOW THE PASSAT COMPARES	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
VW PASSAT 1.8S 20v ESTATE	1781/125	3350	10.9	26.2/19.1	31	26 ¹ / ₂ /30*	112	100/78	2.8/10.9	467
Audi A4 1.8 20v 4-door	1781/125	3330	10.3	24.8/18.0	35 ¹ / ₂	24/23*	109	95/68	2.8/10.7	448
Ford Mondeo 2.0i 16v Estate	1989/136	3625	9.5	22.8/15.1	30	27/16*	109	100/71	3.0/10.4	463
Mitsubishi Galant 2.0GLS Estate†	1997/134	3095	8.8	23.0/16.5	35	27/16*	109	102/78	3.0/11.1	468
Peugeot 406 2.0 16v 4-door	1998/135	3210	10.5	27.2/17.6	32 ¹ / ₂	25 ¹ / ₂ /36*	111	99/74	3.2/11.0	456
Vauxhall Vectra 1.8 16v Estate†	1796/115	2940	11.1	28.6/20.8	38 ¹ / ₂	24/28*	111	101/75	3.0/10.9	449
VW Passat 1.9TDi 110 4-door	1896/110	2450	11.1	21.4/15.9	53	24 ¹ / ₂ /18*	110	102/74	2.8/10.9	468
† performance/economy figures for 4-door saloon						*with ABS			(p) all power-assisted	