

**TEST
UPDATE**

VW Polo

Featuring 1.6CL 100 saloon



What's new?

Classic four-door saloon joins three- and five-door Polos, along with a gaggle of new power units and an auto gearbox. Since the end of 1996, all VWs now have a three-year, unlimited warranty.

DESPITE THE FIESTA'S CHALK-TO-CHEESE conversion, VW's baby Golf is still a front-running contender in the supermini stakes, with refinement, at-the-wheel appeal and legendary Teutonic build quality all available by the bucketful.

The line-up of three- and five-door hatchbacks has been expanded over the last year or so. Saloon, diesel and automatic options have been added, followed by a more powerful, all-new aluminium engine for the one-litre base model. There's also an "extra strong mint" – the 16-valve 1.4 with a dizzy 100bhp tucked away under its bonnet.

However, engine and body permutations can be confusing to say the least, not helped by the fact that the Spanish-built saloon (assembled alongside its Seat

Cordoba stablemate) has its own trio of power units, none of which appears in the German-made hatchbacks. Neither the 1.0- nor 1.4-litre engine, for example, is available in the saloon; the auto 'box is available mated to 1.4 (60bhp) or 1.6 (75bhp) power only in the hatchbacks; the new 16-valve 1.4 can be had with only three or five doors, and the new *direct-injection* SDi diesel comes only with four. The SDi and 100bhp 1.6 engines aren't available in the Cordoba, either. Confusing isn't it?

Despite being confined to the saloon, the 100bhp eight-valve 1.6 we've sampled is an interesting proposition. Based on a familiar VW engine (different from the units in the 1.4 and 1.6 hatchbacks), it employs variable-length intake manifold geometry – new to VW – to deliver relatively high top-end power while preserving good pulling power lower down the scale. And what a peach it is, too, with smooth top-end vigour matched by just as impressive get-up-and-go lower down. Indeed, it feels significantly more enthusiastic than its 3500rpm for peak torque might suggest. Admittedly, low gearing helps (in fact, this is one of the lowest-geared Polos we've encountered), but this also makes things feel distinctly busy at cruising speed.

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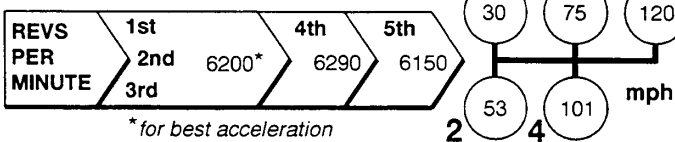
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		2.0	4.1	7.0	10.4
IN 5TH GEAR		6.1	11.8	17.6	24.0
IN 4TH GEAR		4.3	8.4	12.6	17.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	12.8/9.2		11.5/8.3		
		11.8/8.4		12.2/9.0	

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	29½/45½
Typical mpg overall	36
Realistic tank range*	40 litres/320 miles
*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience	

FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type front-mounted, transverse four-cylinder; iron block and alloy head with five main bearings

Size 81.0 x 77.4mm = 1595cc

Power 100bhp at 5800rpm

Torque 103 lb ft at 3500rpm

Valves single (belt-driven) overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets; variable intake geometry

Fuel/ignition electronic multi-point injection with integrated spark timing via coil and distributor. 45-litre tank, no low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 19.5 in 5th

Rpm at 70mph 3590 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: torsion beam axle/trailing arms and coil springs. Telescopic dampers all round

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.1 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 10.4m between kerbs, with 15.6m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J steel with 185/60R14 82H tyres (Michelin MXV3A on test car). Space-saver spare wheel

Brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with vacuum servo. Electronic anti-lock (option on all models) fitted on test car

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

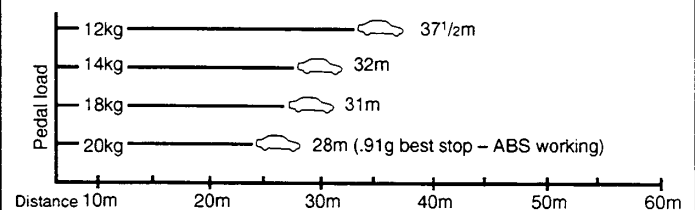
Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience (the more black blobs the better)

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

BRAKES

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

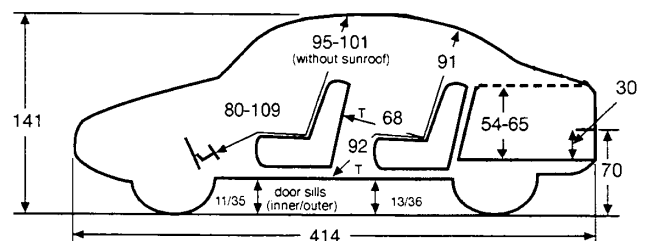
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with optional ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



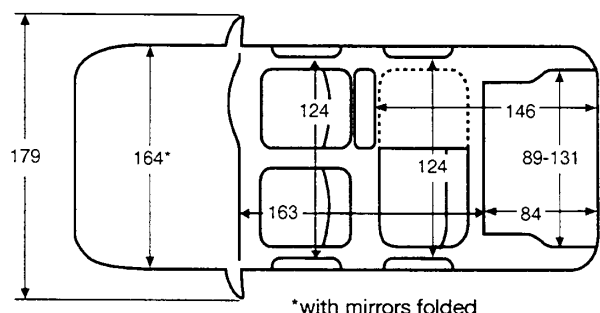
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop: 13kg at start of test, 15kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

MEASUREMENTS – 4-door

Centimetres



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



*with mirrors folded

Compared with the lighter 1.6-litre/75bhp five-door we tested (see R9612A), this 1.6's 30 per cent power boost lifts maximum speed from 108mph to a racy 120mph, with around 1½sec lopped off the 30 to 70mph dash. Not only is it fleetier of foot than the 75bhp version, though, it's also significantly more hushed and refined, but despite performance-oriented gearing, the saloon's increased bulk tells against it if the gear lever is left alone.

Like its hatchback counterparts, the saloon displays the same impressive road manners and chassis refinement, with the heavier body seeming to quell the hatch's tendency to fidget and fret a little over sharp ridges. Power steering (standard on all but the two cheapest hatches) keeps things light and responsive around town, while the nicely weighted disc/drum brakes provide progressive, reassuring stops. Anti-lock costs extra across the board, though.

But why opt for a saloon over the more versatile hatchback? Give or take the odd centimetre, rear passengers benefit little; indeed, headroom is marginally inferior. Round at the back and up its sleeve, however, lurks the saloon's ace – a simply colossal boot. Reaching the far-flung corners of it calls for a bit of stooping and stretching, while wheelarch intrusion and the restricted loading aperture hamper getting big loads on board. But if a smallish car with massive boot space is what you need, then the Polo saloon's for you.

Not surprisingly, the availability of the 1.6 100's extra power (not to mention every encouragement to use it), makes it thirstier than lesser-powered versions. But even though our 36mpg

average begins to look a shade thirsty for a small family saloon, all things considered, it's still a fair result. Driven sedately, it will squeeze up to about 45 miles out of each gallon, while the nominally 45-litre tank allows a slightly below-par 320 miles between refills. On the insurance front, the potent 1.6 attracts a group 9 rating – higher than the 6 or 7 for 75bhp versions, but a group lower than for the 16-valve 1.4.

The saloon mirrors most of the strengths (many) and weaknesses (few) of the hatch, though the lofty boot and mediocre rear vision hinder aiming when reversing. The lack of a rear wash and wipe brings relief from the hatch's dribbly, trigger-happy washer arrangement, while as with the hatch, some of the abundant load space comes via the debatable virtue of a less convenient "space-saver" spare wheel.

VERDICT

You can buy what is essentially this Polo saloon as a Seat Cordoba, if you prefer, though not (so far, at least) if you want this particularly impressive power unit. The four-door's more conservative styling make a refreshing alternative for buyers who prefer the lines of a traditional booted saloon, and (despite its limitations) that load-swallowing "black hole" round the back is really the saloon's *pièce de résistance*. This exceedingly good 100bhp 1.6, like the super-economical direct-injection SDi diesel, is currently restricted to availability only in the saloon. A great shame, too, given the hatchback's greater practicality and appeal, mated to its excellent all-round dynamic qualities.

