

VW Sharan

Featuring 2.8 VR6 GL



A PART FROM TOYOTA'S EIGHT-SEATER Previa, plus token rivalry from the Nissan Prairie, the Renault Espace has ruled the multi-purpose vehicle roost up to now. The four-wheel drive bubble seems to have burst, though, and MPVs are predicted to be one of the next big growth areas. So, the trendsetting Espace is set to face some stiffer competition.

Ford and Volkswagen's new joint manufacturing facility in Portugal gives us the stylish Galaxy and Sharan duo. Meanwhile, Peugeot/Citroën and Fiat have also combined forces, resulting in the Peugeot 806, Citroën Synergie and Fiat Ulysse trio. There are quite a few more MPVs on the way from other manufacturers, too.

The Sharan and Galaxy are effectively badge-engineered versions of the same vehicle. Subtle differences, like the front grille and detailed price and equipment variations distinguish them, but most of what we say about the Sharan applies equally to the Galaxy.

Whichever badge it wears, the Sharan or Galaxy

offers seating for up to seven and seeks to combine car-like driving enjoyment with the superb versatility MPVs provide. Size-wise it's fractionally shorter than, say, a Mondeo Estate, although its wider, taller body provides a much roomier and more versatile cabin.

Under the short, steeply raked bonnet there's a choice of three power units – two-litre petrol; a husky 2.8-litre V6 and, from the end of 1995, a super-economical direct injection turbo-diesel. All versions sport VW engines under the bonnet, except the two-litre Galaxy, which uses Ford's Dagenham-built Scorpio unit. Automatic transmission is available with either petrol engine, and there's a choice of three trim levels with any of the power units.

Negotiate the higher-than-normal step-up into the Sharan, and it's more like your lounge than a car. Armrest-equipped swivelling "captain's chairs" make life relaxing for the driver and "navigator", with seating for up to five more behind, in 2-3-2 layout.

As in the Espace, the individual seats can be rearranged into a selection of floor-mounting slots,

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph 3.1	0-60mph 9.4	1/4 mile 17.2
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.7	3.6	6.3	9.4
IN 5TH GEAR		5.8	11.7	18.0	24.9
IN 4TH GEAR		4.6	9.1	13.7	18.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES	12.4/9.1		12.2/9.1		
		11.7/9.1		13.2/9.3	

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	6000*	4th	5th	29	78	127
	3rd	6500		5820	mph			
					51	117		
*for best acceleration						2	4	

*for best acceleration

Rpm at 70mph in top – 3210

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Worst/best mpg	21 ¹ / ₂ /30
Typical mpg overall	25
Realistic tank range*	65 litres/360 miles
*based on fuel gauge, warning lamp and filling station experience	

SAFETY AND SECURITY FEATURES

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

Seatbelts

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Head restraints

front ●●●●○ rear ●●●●○

Interior

safety padding ●●●●○

driver's airbag? ☒

other airbags? ☒

side impact protection ●●●●○

Fuel anti-spillage

●●●●○

Door locking

central locking? ☒

remote control? ☒

auto window closure? ☒

deadlocks? ☒

Luggage

secure from interior/hidden ☒

from view ●●●●○

Alarm

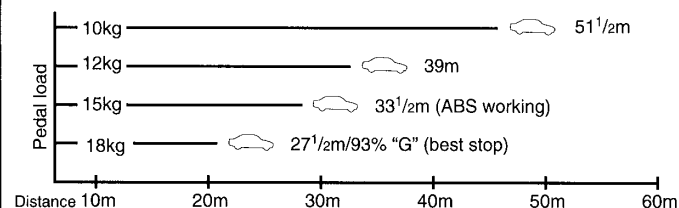
engine immobilised? ☒

☒ standard on test car ☐ factory fitted option ☒ not available

BRAKES

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

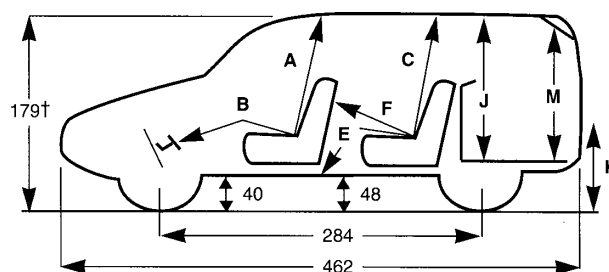
Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 28m at 20-30kg pedal load)



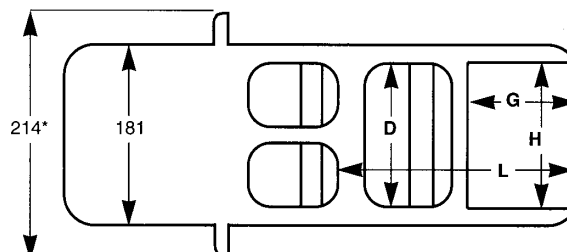
Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
13kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

DIMENSIONS

Centimetres



†including roof rails



* 196 with mirrors folded

Inside – figures in brackets are for third row of seats,
set fully back

A Front headroom	98-104	G Load length † (third row out)	115/106
B Front legroom (min - max)	80-107	H Load floor width (at floor/waist level)	112/116
C Rear headroom	95 (91)	J Maximum load height	119
D Back seat width (between armrests)	146 (114)	K Sill height (inner/outer)	0/60
E Typical rear *† legroom	105/114 (95/91)	L Load length (third row in use/tilted forwards)	200 (27/76)
F Typical rear *† kneeroom	79/88 (76/67)	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	98

with handy picnic tables set into their backrests. This extremely versatile and adaptable layout caters for diverse needs ranging from a roomy two-seat Super-van up to a seven-seat minibus with almost limitless permutations in between.

We picked VW's glorious 174bhp VR6 engine for our first look at the Sharan. What a beauty it is, too. Shoe-horned into the cramped engine bay, the compact V6 is smooth and lusty, delivering vigorous sub-10sec 30 to 70mph acceleration, along with a swift -- if academic -- 127mph top speed.

Its deep, sonorous burble never completely disappears, though, while prominent induction howl surfaces when it's opened up. Lively performance and the hefty ton-and-three-quarters kerbweight can take their toll at the fuel pumps, but our 25mpg average is

a pretty impressive result. Expect about 3 to 5mpg less for the automatic.

Thanks to a multitude of adjustments, the commanding driving position suits a wide range of shapes and sizes, while the nicely weighted power steering, smooth clutch and slick gearshift make the Sharan easy and unthreatening to drive. Apart from obstructive front pillars and the nose being invisible beyond the base of the huge windscreen, it's just like a car to drive, although the higher cabin makes for a safer and much more interesting view out.

Safety and security aren't forgotten, with twin airbags on most models, and full three-point inertia reel seatbelts for all except the middle seat in the centre row. Beyond this, all seats have height-adjustable head restraints, and every model is fitted with a transponder



Likes . . . and gripes

Lusty V6 power . . .	but engine noisy when revved
Solid construction and feel . . .	but firm ride over the bumps
Versatile seating and cargo options . . .	but cargo space limited with full set of passengers
"Welcome aboard" interior lighting . . .	but access awkward for the less agile
Separate heating and ventilation for rear . . .	but no face-level vents and only a single, small sunroof
Lofty, multi-adjustable driving position, convenient left footrest . . .	difficult underbonnet access, and group 14 insurance

key immobiliser. Only the top Carat version comes with an alarm as standard, though.

Inside, there's separate rear heating and ventilation, while a generous array of courtesy and reading lights provides welcome illumination at night. Fresh air is limited with the heater or demisting in use, and the blower fan is noisy on all but its feeble slow setting. In warm weather, a bigger (or second) sunroof would be nice on non-air conditioned models, too, although the dearer models' electric rear quarter windows are a convenient touch.

There's a comprehensive range of accessories available, including a cooler box cum fridge, integrated child safety seats and more bike carriers than you can shake a stick at. There's also a four-wheel drive Syncro version in the pipeline.

Apart from an isolated rattle from under the fascia, build quality and finish are all you would expect from VW. The VR6's group 14 rating will make insurance quite pricey, however, while its jam-packed engine bay should deter all but the most avid do-it-yourselfers.

VERDICT

The Espace may have been top dog up to now, but the Galaxy/Sharan duo sets impressive new standards for the class. Its solid build, polished refinement and firm but well controlled ride are perhaps as easy-going and car-like as the roomy, ever-versatile MPV can get.

Despite keen pricing, it's well equipped and one of the best all-rounders you'll find on four wheels. A few more cup holders, map lockers and the like wouldn't go amiss, though, and it still hasn't solved the problem of where to put all the luggage with a full complement of passengers on board.

The only real problem, at least until some of the other new MPVs appear on the scene, seems to be which to go for – Galaxy or Sharan. Ford's unrivalled dealer coverage might have some bearing on the matter. Otherwise, we suggest that you pick whichever trim and equipment specification best suits your needs – and your pocket. Disappointment is unlikely with any of them.



FOR THE TECHNICAL

ENGINE

Type transverse V6; iron block and alloy head

Size 81.0mm bore x 90.3mm stroke = 2792cc

Power 174bhp at 5800rpm

Torque 177 lb ft at 4200rpm

Valves single overhead camshaft per bank actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel/ignition Motronic multi-point injection and integrated distributorless ignition. 75-litre tank with low-level warning lamp

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual, front-wheel drive

Mph per 1000rpm 21.8 in 5th, 18.0 in 4th

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by coil spring/damper struts, lower wishbones. Rear: independent subframe located semi-trailing arms, coil springs. Front and rear anti-roll bars and gas-filled dampers

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.3 turns between locks. Turning circles average 11.3m between kerbs, with 18.2m circle for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J steel with 205/60R15 95H tyres

Brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with vacuum servo. ABS standard on VR6 and Carat models, optional on all others