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Latest Volkswagen Beetle – Road Test

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Nearly 80 years of 'Beetling' about

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) test drives the 2017 VW Beetle.

With more and more volume produced cars these days looking more and more alike,

are very few iconic core designs left to tempt those owners who do not want run-of-the mill designs. These buyers are independent minded, aloof to what is the latest must-have - me-too fashionable car, hatchback, SUV or sports car. They prefer to be different, adopting a classic timeless looking car which is affordable but priceless in its own way

Of the numerous volume selling brands we have today what can we say hints back to their



original classic iconic design? The MINI, Fiat 500, Jeep and the VW Beetle are the mainstay models with perhaps the Porsche 911, Audi TT and Ford with their revised Mustang eligible – but the Jaguar and Land Rover brands are losing their heritage design features.

The iconic design VW Beetle is now closing in on its 80th anniversary. The original model was conceived in 1935 and went into full production in 1938 as Germany's 'people's car'. It was just known as 'the Volkswagen' with its rear air-cooled four cylinder Boxer petrol engine of 986ccs with 24 hp. This was wrapped in a two door four-seater body with steeply raked front and rear ends. It had outboard wings and running boards. It was available as a saloon, saloon with a cloth sunroof and a convertible.



Production restarted after WW2 under the control of the British military authority and the



vehicle became the foundation stone of Volkswagen. The VW Group of brands has gone on to compete with Toyota to be the world's number one car manufacturer. Last year VW Group produced over six million vehicles, built at over 50 locations in 14 countries and supplying more than 150 markets.

The last 'original' series Beetle manufactured by Volkswagen rolled off the Mexican production line in 2003. New Beetle with its front engine, front wheel drive and three doors is longer, wider and lower, and started in production in Mexico in January 1998, followed by a second generation in July 2011 (arriving in the UK in 2012) and also built in Mexico where production continues today. Late in 2016 today's Beetle received a major facelift. To date over one million New Beetles have been sold, 68,000 of them in the UK.

The 2017 VW Beetle range for the UK market consists of three door Coupé and two door Cabriolet core models with 1.2 TSI 105 hp and 1.4 TSI 150 hp petrol engines plus 2.0 TDI 110 and 150 hp turbodiesel engines, all with the choice of manual and DSG auto transmissions. Depending on the engine chosen there are Beetle, Design and R-Line specification levels. In addition there is a Dune design for both body styles with 1.2 TSI 105 hp and 2.0 TDI 150 hp engine options, both with manual or auto gearbox options. The Dune with its 'jacked up' suspension, 18-inch alloy wheels, front and rear wheelarch extensions and bold bumpers is a tribute to the modified 'Baja Bugs' of the rear engine original Beetles associated with west coast America.

Today's Beetle prices, including Dune variants, sees the three door Coupé starting from £17,370 rising to £25,950, and the two door Cabriolet starts from £20,380 rising to £29,150.

My test version was the mid-range Beetle Design 1.4 litre TSI 150 hp six-speed manual priced at £21,710 but it came with a host of extras, including Discover Sat-Nav with Car-Net Guide and Inform with its small 6.5-inch touchscreen, Car-Net App Connect, front and rear parking sensors, uprated climate control, alternative 18-inch wheels and automatic dimming mirrors, auto lights and wipers plus the attractive Bottle Green metallic paint, pushing the price up to £24,600.



My test drive Beetle Coupé's price was not expensive considering what you pay for today's well equipped family hatchbacks, and it is less commonplace with its modern but still retro design which makes it ageless and classless, perhaps even a modern-day classic.

By comparison the updated, but rather blandly styled, VW Golf three door hatchback with a 1.4 TFI turbo petrol engine with no supercharger and only with 125 hp and SE Nav spec will cost just over £20k and the five door version just under £21k.

The latest Beetle uses the platform of the last generation VW Golf but with an extended wheelbase. It still has the domed passenger compartment with its steeply raked rear end but it now has an elongated front bonnet. The tailgate has a spoiler fitted for most versions. Today's modern Beetle still sports those bold wheelarches, termed 'wings' of older times, and they are linked front to rear by the protruding bottom edges of the doors and rear side panels to resemble the running boards of the original Beetle. Today's larger Beetle is 4,288 mm (14.07 ft) long, 1,825 mm (5.99 ft) wide and 1,488 mm (4.88 ft) high with a longer wheelbase of 2,524 mm (8.28.ft).

The most recent facelift has given the car sharper styling lines for the bonnet, sides and rear end. Bold design front and rear bumpers complete the styling changes, which give the latest Beetle classy but still classic retro kerb appeal for those owners who dare to be different with the choice of their car.



Inside the retro styling continues with its high level full width fascia and high waistline. The fascia panel houses a retro style glovebox with a lift up lid and below that is a drop-down storage compartment. There is a centrally mounted touchscreen flanked by air vents and in front of the driver is a flat bottomed Audi style steering wheel with multi-function controls, and a cowled binnacle housing retro style instruments. At each outer end of the fascia are circular air vents. The centre console under the touchscreen accommodates easy to use heating and ventilation controls. This console units leads down to the gearlever, handbrake, circular cup holders and central armrest.



In the rear are two comfortable bench seats with fold down rear seat backs, which extend the larger boot from 310 litres (10.95 cu.ft) with the seats in use to 905 (31.96 cu.ft) litres with the seat backs folded down. Rear seat legroom is not plentiful and getting into and out of the rear seats via the two passenger doors is challenging, but then retro is all about breaking away from what's convenient and average today. Safety features are totally modern though and include a laser welded body for high torsional rigidity plus twin front and side airbags. ABS braking and an Electronic Stability programme are also standard on all versions. Standard spec includes electric front windows, electric heated and **adjustable door mirrors**, air-con, DAB radio, alloy wheels, Bluetooth, automatic post-collision braking, computer and remote central locking. The Design level additions include larger alloy wheels, front fog lights with cornering function, rear tailgate spoiler, twin exhaust tailpipes for the 1.4 TSI petrol engine model, upgraded cloth upholstery and eight speakers.



The suspension is also new for sharper handling and a compliant ride with coil springs and shock absorbers at the front with rear gas pressure shock absorbers and separate coil springs. Generally the ride was comfortable and only the worst of shocks from impact from potholes was felt and generally through the rear of the cabin.

The 1.4 litre, four cylinder petrol engine has four valves per cylinder and uses a supercharger and a turbocharger. The supercharger works initially before the turbocharger cuts in, providing a strong linear power delivery from just 1,500 rpm up to 6,000 rpm. Power output is 150 hp but it is the 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm to 3,500 rpm that provides the very usable response during acceleration from low to high speeds without the need for copious amounts of gearchanges.

Acceleration response for overtaking slow vehicles in sixth gear even from 40 mph was really impressive and rapid. Top speed is 126 mph and zero to 62 mph takes just 8.7 seconds. Cruising at the legal maximum motorway speed the engine was relaxed, and if the engine was taken to just under 3,000 rpm this would give just over 70 mph (where legal). Drive to the front wheels is through a short-throw six-speed manual gearbox, although a seven-speed DSG dual clutch auto is an option. The latest Beetle might be retro in style but it's thoroughly modern in the performance department.

With CO2 emissions of 132 g/km the new VED road tax First Year cost is £200 reducing to the new £140 Standard rate for Year Two onwards. The official Combined Cycle fuel economy is 49.6 mpg and my week long test driving using busy roads over the Easter period returned 43.8 mpg. Insurance is Group 20E.

VERDICT

So in short the latest VW Beetle is distinctive, it's retro in style so it's ageless, it's also classless and it doesn't carry a fashionable high price to give it exclusivity. It's yours for a very reasonable price with more than reasonable performance and affordable running costs. It's not very practical though, with its two door body layout but it offsets that with great kerb appeal and it stands out in a crowd, probably just like its owner in today's society.



For: Ageless and classless distinctive retro styling, potent supercharged and turbocharged small capacity petrol engine, attractively priced with low running costs, high specification, good build quality.

Against: Restrictive access to rear seats, limited rear seat legroom, not as practical as a modern family hatchback but not as dull in terms of styling.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Volkswagen Beetle Design 1.4 litre TSI 150 hp petrol six speed



manual.

Price: £21,710 (£24,600 as tested).

Engine/transmission: Front mounted 1.4 litre, four cylinder TSI supercharger/turbocharger petrol, 150 hp, 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, six speed manual with front wheel drive.

Performance: 126 mph, zero to 62 mph 8.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 49.6 mpg (43.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 132 g/km, new VED road tax cost £200 then £140 thereafter, BiK company car tax rating 25%.

Insurance Group: 20E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,288 mm (14.07 ft), W 1,825 mm (5.99 ft), H 1,488 mm (4.88 ft), boot/load space 310 to 905 litres (10.95 to 31.96 cu.ft), three door Coupé /four seats.