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Revamped Skoda Fabia – First Impressions

Published: October 12, 2018

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/revamped-skoda-fabia-first-impressions/>



Probably 'piece of cake' sales success for the revised Skoda Fabia

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) reports...

To coincide with the launch of the revised Fabia range of 'supermini' sector five door Hatch and Estates, Skoda UK has commissioned professional baker and 2016 Great British Bake Off winner, Candice Brown, to produce a small-scale version of the iconic Fabia cake which starred in the hit 2007 TV ad. That cake was nearly four metres long and one-and-a-half metres high (about 13 feet and five feet, respectively)...



But in today's world of falling new car sales is it going to be a 'piece of cake' for Skoda to maintain the Fabia's appeal and popularity?

The Czech Skoda brand was founded in 1895, making it one of the World's oldest manufacturers. New ingredients were added in 1991 when it became a member of the Volkswagen Group. In 2017 Skoda delivered 1.2 million new vehicles to global customers in over 100 countries, giving it four consecutive record years of sales growth. It operates at three locations in the Czech Republic, it manufactures in China, Russia, Slovakia, Algeria and India, mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan with



local partners, and Skoda employs over 35,000 people globally.

Currently the brand offers eight passenger-car ranges; the Citigo, Fabia, Rapid, Octavia, Karoq, Kodiaq, Superb and the Kamiq in China. Skoda is now introducing higher specification Sportline derivatives to their Superb Hatch and Estate models and the Kodiaq large SUV. In 2019 the brand will add the Kodiaq vRS, a mid-sized Hatch range to replace the Rapid models, the Superb range will receive a facelift, the Superb Hybrid models will be added to the line-up, a small SUV codenamed Vision X will join the line-up and in 2020 Vision E electric models will join the range.

Over 4.2million Fabias have been sold worldwide since the first generation appeared in 1999 and in the UK 19,000 were sold last year. In the UK consecutive years of record Skoda sales overall saw 80,056 units registered last year and so far this year 58,105 new Skodas have been sold with the brand on target to achieve around 80,000 total sales. The UK is Skoda's third largest European market for sales and it has 130 UK dealerships and a further 21 authorised repairers.

The revamped Skoda Fabia five door Hatch prices start from £12,840 and increase through 15 derivatives to £18,435. The five door Estates start from £13,860 and rise through 12 derivatives to £18,320. The all-important PCP monthly purchase prices start from £149 for a 42 month contract. Depending on the body style and engine option chosen there are S, SE, Colour Edition, SE L and Monte Carlo specification levels. The latest EU6d Temp WLTP compliant engine options, again depending on body type and equipment spec, are all 1.0 litre, three cylinder petrol units with 75 hp MPI non-turbo and TSI turbocharged 95 and 110 hp power outputs. A seven speed DSG automatic transmission option is available for the TSI 110 hp engine in addition to the choice of a six speed manual gearbox. All other engines have five speed manual gearboxes. There is no diesel engine option for the revamped range as demand in the UK is very low and no vRS high performance model is planned.



Chris Rowland, Skoda UK's Fabia product manager, said at the media launch this week, retail customers will account for 56% of Fabia's UK sales, 90% of customers will choose a manual version, 80% will choose a Hatch body style, 42% of customers will choose the 1.0 litre 95 hp engine and 50% will opt for the best selling SE specification level. He said the single best selling model will be the 1.0 litre TSI 95 hp SE Hatch, priced at £14,845 with a PCP 42 monthly cost from £169, and that is the version I tried.

Because the updated Skoda Hatch and Estate car range is mid-way through its life cycle it doesn't gain the VW Group's latest MQB platform which has given the all-new generation VW Polo and SEAT Ibiza supermini models significant improvements in interior space. The Fabia retains the older PQ25 platform but it does use some of the MQB's technology and specification to improve safety in addition to having higher levels of specification. All these improvements add up to an average £525 price increase across the range. The third generation Fabia was noted for its roomy rear interior space and in those areas it still out-



performs all but the Polo and Ibiza models. Other competitors are the new Ford Fiesta, the new Citroën C3, Hyundai i20 and older Vauxhall Corsa.



The Fabia facelift includes a wider new grille, re-styled headlights with LED headlights as an option for the first time, larger under front bumper honeycomb grille, new bumper, new styled alloy wheels, new rear bumper with integrated reflectors and new rear taillights with LED technology as an option. The interior has received a general upgrading of materials plus new instrument layout and the 6.5-inch touchscreen with Smartlink supports Apple CarPlay, Android Auto and MirrorLink connectivity and support systems. Although the touchscreen is larger it still looks 'old school' compared with the latest competitor models. DAB radio and Bluetooth connectivity are standard but for most versions a mobile phone must be used for navigation unless you upgrade to the £570 Amundsen touchscreen navigation system.

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Some of the standard spec items for the best selling SE level include 15 inch alloy wheels, alarm, electric front windows, electrically heated and adjustable door mirrors, front assist detection, front fog lights, LED daytime running lights, manual air-con, rear parking sensors, remote central locking, stop start system, umbrella under the front passenger seat and an ice scraper and tyre depth gauge located in the fuel filler panel.

Now manufacturers like to showcase extra cost options on their test cars at media launches. My £14,845 SE model actually had over £4k's worth of options added to the specification. The highest costs items were the £570 integrated sat-nav system, £960 full LED headlights with adaptive front light system and cornering fog lights, £295 acoustic front and rear parking sensors, adaptive cruise control at £380, climate control air-con at £305, electric rear windows at £165 plus many more smaller costs items.

One of the previous appealing features about the Fabia Hatch was the interior space it offered in its sector and that still remains the case apart from the new generation larger Polo and Ibiza models. At 3,997 mm (13.11 ft) in length with a wheelbase of 2,470 mm (8.10 ft) it still provides comfortable accommodation for up to five passengers and it still has one of the largest boots in its sector with 330 litres (11.65 cu.ft) of space and this can be increased to 1,150 litres (40.61 cu.ft) with the rear seatbacks folded down. The Estate at 4,262 mm (13.98 ft) in length offers 550 litres (19.42 cu.ft) of load space with the rear seats in position and 1,395 litres (49.26 cu.ft) with the seats folded down.

The older PQ25 platform still provides for agile and precise handling and the ride remains noticeable compliant and comfortable, aided by the sensibly sized 15-inch wheels with those bump-cushioning high walled tyres.

The 1.0 litre TSI three cylinder turbocharged petrol engine with the 95 hp output remains the sensible choice and is the most popular. It's responsive with 160 Nm (118 lb.ft) of torque available from 1,800 rpm so it performs adequately enough for docile in-town travel or on more open roads. Certainly travelling along the winding Berkshire lanes around the media launch venue it proved very responsive with its wide torque band of up to 3,500 rpm,



minimizing the effect of only having a five speed gearbox, with the ample torque minimizing the need for constant gearchanges.

Top speed is 114 mph, with zero to 62 mph taking 10.8 seconds. The official new WLTP Combined Cycle fuel consumption figure is 61.4 mpg and on my test drive, mainly country lanes, the figure was 53.8 mpg. With CO2 emissions of just 106 g/km VED First Year road tax costs an appealing low £145 before the £140 Standard rate is applied for year two onwards. Company car drivers will pay just 22% Benefit-in-Kind tax. The insurance is a low Group 9E and the warranty an ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.

VERDICT

The updated and refreshed Skoda Fabia Hatch has all the ingredients to continue its UK sales success story - it should be a 'piece of cake'!

For: Practical, affordable, improved specification, attractive finance options, comfortable, low running and tax costs.

Against: Doesn't have the latest roomier VW Group 'supermini' platform, old-school touchscreen and infotainment system, some hard areas of interior plastic trim, watch out for adding unnecessary extra cost options, ungenerous warranty.



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

Revised 2019 Skoda Fabia Hatch 1.0 TSI 95 SE.

Price: £14,845 (£18,860 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol, 95 hp, 160 Nm (118 lb.ft) of torque from 1,800 rpm, five speed manual.



Performance: 114 mph, 0-62mph 10.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP compliant Combined Cycle 61.4 mpg (53.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 106 g/km, VED road tax £145/£140, BiK company car tax 22%.

Insurance Group: 9E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 3,997 mm (13.11 ft), W 1,732 mm (5.68 ft), H 1,467 mm (4.81 ft), wheelbase 2,470 mm (8.10 ft), boot/load space 330 to 1,150 litres (11.65 to 40.61 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,000 kg (2,205 lb).