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Revised VW Passat – First Impressions

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LATEST GENERATION VW PASSAT DEBUTS IN THE UK.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

From its launch in 1973 The Passat is now Volkswagen's longest-lived name-plate after the Beetle went out of production this year.

With over 30 million sold worldwide in 46 years, the Passat is the best-selling mid-size car in the world after eight versions have been launched. In the UK the Mark 8 models launched in 2014 have now had a mid-life refresh with new/revised engines including a more capable



GTE PHEV (Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle) option, higher standard specification, better connectivity and general all-round improvements.

Last year UK sales of the Passat range of four door saloons and five door estates and Alltrack models were 12,444 units. The D-segment sized Passat range sits below the VW Arteon and above the VW Golf models. Its competitors include the Audi A4, Mercedes-Benz C-Class, BMW 3 Series, Ford Mondeo and Vauxhall Insignia plus others from Peugeot, Citroen, Kia, Hyundai and Volvo.

With deliveries to UK customers starting at the end of this month (September) Volkswagen UK expects the revised Passat's sales to be split 68% to fleet customers and 32% to retail buyers with estates being the most popular body style. The fuel split is expected to be 47% diesel, 28% petrol and 25% GTE PHEV.



The refreshed range might have been simplified but I counted 46 different derivatives covering all body styles, spec levels and powertrain options. There are eight variants/spec levels offered in the UK and these are SE, SE Nav, SEL, R-Line and a limited run Estate only R-Line Edition from launch. These sell alongside the specialist Alltrack Estate and GTE and GTE Advance Saloon and Estate models.

Prices for the Passat range start at £25,370 for the 1.5 litre TSI EVO 150 hp six speed manual saloon with SE specification, rising to £45,050 for the R Line Edition Estate with a 2.0 TDI 240 hp engine and seven speed DSG auto gearbox with 4Motion traction.



The full UK range of engines comprises of three petrols, four diesels and a PHEV petrol-electric plug-in hybrid powertrain. The petrol engines range in power from 150-272 hp, while the diesel engines range from 120-240hp. Top petrol and diesel engines have DSG and 4MOTION all-wheel drive as standard. All engines on the Passat, including the TSI petrols, now have particulate filters. The new 2.0 TDI 150 hp turbodiesel engine has Active Cylinder Technology (called EVO in Volkswagen nomenclature) which can shut down two of the four cylinders under certain low-load conditions in order to save fuel.

The PHEV plug-in hybrid GTE is back and enhanced for performance from its 1.4 litre TSI four cylinder 150 hp turbocharged petrol engine and electric motor giving a combined power output of 218 hp and combined torque of 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) with its standard fit six speed DSG auto gearbox. The official Combined Cycle fuel economy is 201.7 mpg with CO2 emissions of 36 g/km. The electric power only driving range has been increased to 43 miles from the previous 31 miles figure. One in every four Passats sold in the UK are expected to be GTE variants, up from one in ten previously. The new GTE models are approximately 5% cheaper than the outgoing versions (around £2,500) which should go some way to offset the Government's recent decision to abolish the £3,500 purchase contribution for PHEV vehicles.



A high proportion of GTE model UK sales will come from company car users as the Benefit-in-Kind tax rate is a low 16% and all customers, retail/fleet will benefit from the zero cost First Year VED road tax cost and the alternative fuel lower £135 VED cost for the Standard rate. However the top Estate version of the GTE exceeds the £40k on-the-road price so it will be liable for the added £310 annual supplement for five years. GTE Saloon prices range from £36,390 to £38,940, whilst GTE Estates are £37,920 to £40,470.

The new Passat is the first Volkswagen to be fitted with Travel Assist as standard – a system that allows the car to be driven at up to 130 mph where legal (not the UK) in a partially automated mode.

It combines the latest version of Adaptive Cruise Control, version 3.0, which can now auto



adjust the speed including temporary speed-limits as well as slowing for junctions and corners. It is led by information from road sign recognition and GPS.

This is combined with Lane Assist version 2.0 which can now recognise kerbs and grass verges as well as road markings. This new driver-assistance technology will be standard across the Passat range. All models also now have as standard LED headlights, LED running lights and rear lights and Wireless App Connect.

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At this week's media launch it was the first opportunity for us to drive the new Passat models in the UK and the first opportunity anywhere for us 'scribes' to drive the Saloon. So with that in mind, plus the overall decline in diesel sales in our domestic market, I opted for the Passat Saloon GTE Advance 1.4 litre TSI, PHEV, 218 hp, six speed DSG auto priced at £38,940. There are extra cost options available such as a £335 rear view camera and Dynamic Chassis Control with variable suspension settings at £895 which would push the price over £40k and incur the higher Standard rate VED road tax for five years, so select with care!

Although the Government's £3,500 subsidy for PHEV vehicles has been dropped and that has caused PHEV sales overall in the UK to fall, VW UK sees their GTE PHEV models more than doubling in popularity because they have reduced the prices by an average £2,500 and that goes a big way to offsetting the lost Government subsidy. There is also the very real bonus of an improved electric power only driving range, lower tax costs and excellent fuel economy.

Despite its relatively small capacity 1.4 litre TSI turbo petrol engine the performance is further boosted with an electric motor. Top speed is 138 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 7.4 seconds. But it's the 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of combined engine and electric motor torque that really makes this powerpack impressive. Torque is immediately available from the electric motor moving off from standstill and the motor goes on giving



'grunt' until the engine starts delivering its torque from 1,500 rpm.



Combined with the six speed DSG auto gearbox the power delivery is immediate and the changes between ratios smooth and the interchange between petrol and electric power imperceptible. There are of course the usual driving modes the driver can use depending upon mood or traffic conditions, and the energy capture to top up the battery through braking is also adjustable depending upon driving conditions.

My short test drive around the Oxfordshire roads included a fast section of 70 mph dual carriageway where the worst fuel economy figure of 46.7 mpg was recorded but once using the winding country roads where energy capture through braking was more common the figure rose to 74.3 mpg and the overall combined fuel economy for my brief road test was 65.2 mpg. Now, like most other PHEVs, that is nowhere near the official Combined Cycle



figure but it is at least as good as a modern diesel engine and with much lower tax costs and arguably with better outright driving performance when needed. If owning a diesel powered car has become prohibitive then PHEVs are a very good replacement providing the price is right and VW have addressed the price issue with the new GTE models.



VERDICT

In all other respects, the added driving and connectivity technologies, high specification, mildly enhanced styling and new and revised powertrains, the refreshed 2020 model year Passats are, shall we say 'conservatively refreshing', so they should continue to be solid, roomy and comfortable business and family use vehicles.



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For: Reduced price, longer electric power only driving range, good real-life petrol engine/electric motor driveability and performance, low tax costs, roomy, comfortable, well equipped.

Against: Ungenerous warranty, unwelcoming bland interior styling, non-compliant ride over some road surfaces.



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



2020 model year Volkswagen Passat Saloon, GTE Advance, 1.4 TSI, PHEV, 218 hp, six speed DSG auto.

Price: £38,940.

Powerpack: 1.4 litre, four cylinder direct injection turbocharged 150 hp petrol engine plus electric motor with a combined power output of 218 hp and 400 Nm (295 lb.ft), seven speed automatic, front wheel drive.

Performance: 138 mph, 0-62 mph 7.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 201.7 mpg (65.2 mpg on test), electric power only driving range 43-miles.

Emissions and taxation: CO2 36 g/km, First Year road tax £0, £135 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 16%.

Insurance Group: 26E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles, battery pack eight years/99,360 miles.

Dimensions: L 4,775 mm (15.67 ft), W 1,832 mm (6.01 ft), H 1,483 mm (4.87 ft), boot/load space 586 to 1,152 litres (20.69 to 40.68 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.