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SEAT Ateca 2.0 TDi 150 XCELLENCE Road Test

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At last SEAT joins the SUV race for sales...

Says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

It had to be only a matter of time before SEAT, the Spanish brand in the Volkswagen Group of car companies, produced their much needed SUV or Crossover vehicle range.

With almost half the UK new car market now taken up by sales of SUVs, 4x4s or Crossover models, SEAT had a big hole in their range of offerings to customers.

And it showed in their UK sales with an 11% drop in new car sales in 2015, and a further fall of 10% for the first six months of this year - but the latest figures show the deficit has halved following the recent launch of their mid-sized Ateca SUV/Crossover range. However



on a global scale, selling in 75 countries, where SUVs tend to be less important, SEAT's sales in 2015 reached 400,000 units, their highest figure since 2007.

Looking on the bright side of life the late-arriving Ateca should mean that SEAT are able to leapfrog some of the longer serving SUVs/Crossovers in terms of specification, engine technology and sharper prices.

The competition however is established and strong, with the Nissan Qashqai still the market leader and with the new Kia Sportage also featuring in the UK's top ten sales chart - and in Europe the similarly sized Renault Kadjar is very popular. There are of course lots of other competitors that include the VW Tiguan, Hyundai Tucson, Peugeot 3008, Toyota RAV4, Ford Kuga, Skoda Yeti, MINI Countryman, Suzuki Vitara/S-Cross, Honda HR-V, Mitsubishi ASX, MG GS and the Dacia Duster. Of course there are premium brand SUVs of a similar size from Audi, BMW, Infiniti, Lexus, Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz.

All Ateca models are five door, five seater mid-sized SUVs with a wide range of engine options, most are 2WD but there is a limited number of 4WD variants as well. The sharp prices start from £17,990 and increase up to £29,990.

The specification choices are S, SE, First Edition (which are all sold out), SE Technology and XCELLENCE plus a full range of extra cost high-tech options and personalisation items. The engine line-up has a choice of five turbocharged units, all using SEAT's Ecomotive technology including stop/start and energy recovery. The petrol engines are a new 1.0 litre, three cylinder TSI 115 hp and 1.4 four cylinder TSI 150 hp unit. The turbodiesel range consists of a 1.6 TDI 115 hp and 2.0 TDI 150 and 190 hp units. Both 2.0 litre TDI units are available with a 4Drive all-wheel-drive system and the 190 hp engine has a DSG dual clutch auto gearbox and 4Drive. The all-important CO2 emissions range from 113 to 135 g/km, VED bands are mostly rated C but with a few versions either D or E rated. Combined Cycle fuel economy ranges from 65.7 down to down to 52.3 mpg, insurance groups vary from 8E to 21E and there is a standard three years/60,000 mile warranty, but extended warranties of 75,000 and 90,000 miles can be purchased when the vehicle is ordered.



The most likely best selling version, depending upon the demand from fleet and business user-chooser customers, should be the 1.6 TDI SE turbodiesel priced at £21,900, although the 1.4 TSI petrol SE at £21,015 or even the new 1.0-litre TSI petrol SE priced at £19,950 will prove popular with price-led retail customers.

Although the Ateca is designed and developed by SEAT in Spain it is actually built at the same Czech factory that produces the highly rated Skoda Superb and Yeti. It uses the same well known MQB platform widely used throughout the VW Group brands. SEAT however uses their own settings for the suspension, steering, specification levels and minor styling changes. There is no doubt to me that the Ateca bears more than a passing resemblance to the VW Tiguan mid-sized SUV. It has the same clean lines inside as well with an uncluttered fascia panel and much of the switchgear and controls are found in other VW Group models.

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The exterior design copies most other SUVs in this sector, but with a SEAT family face featuring its trapezoidal lower grille, upper nose grille and triangular light signatures. There is the usual rising side waistline with sharply-defined wheelarch mouldings, leading to a wide-opening tailgate. On some top spec models the tailgate has the autonomous opening function operated by waving a foot under the rear bumper.

Where the Ateca should score over its numerous competitors is the high specification compared to the attractive price structure. So at this point it makes sense to see just what you get for each grade in some detail. Even the base S grade offers 16-inch alloys, electric door mirror adjustment, SEAT's Media System Touch with Bluetooth, USB port, SD card slot and four-speaker audio, height-adjustable driver's seat, split-folding rear seats, boot light, front armrest, leather steering wheel and gear knob trim, power windows, seven airbags, Tiredness Recognition system and the new Front Assist and City Emergency Braking with Pedestrian Protection.

SE grade additions include 17-inch alloys, roof rails, auto-folding door mirrors, LED



taillights, front fog lights with a cornering function, rear reading lights, ambient cabin illumination, rear armrest, roof console with sunglasses holder, front passenger seat height adjustment, cruise control, dual-zone climate control, rear parking sensors, SEAT Drive Profile with Driving Experience button and the Media System Plus, with eight-inch colour touchscreen, integrated voice control and eight-speaker audio.

SE Technology models ride on 18-inch bi-colour alloys and beefed up the infotainment package with the addition of navigation, using 3D mapping and a high-res colour display. There is also an additional SD card slot and the audio system provides DAB radio reception. Style touches include chrome window surrounds and aluminium-finish roof rails.

The Ateca First Edition models were limited to a run of just 200 vehicles for retail customers and which sold out by October 2016. These were equipped with full LED headlights, bi-colour 18-inch wheels, satellite navigation, KESSY keyless entry and go, a power tailgate with hands-free “virtual pedal” opening and closing function, rear-view camera, dark-tinted rear windows and a choice of three dedicated metallic paint finishes.

At the top of the range, XCELLENCE comes with 18-inch alloy wheels, twin chrome tailpipes, aluminium roof rails, dark-tinted rear privacy glass, full LED headlights and taillights, welcome lights in the door mirrors, rear-view camera, LED ambient interior lighting with eight colour options, KESSY keyless entry and go, leather upholstery, black headlining, aluminium door sills, and a Connectivity Hub in the centre console, including a wireless charger. It also comes with a Convenience Pack comprising auto headlights and wipers, an auto-dimming rear-view mirror and automatic coming and leaving home lighting.

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So whatever version is chosen the Ateca scores highly with its comprehensive specification compared to its price. My test version was the 2.0 TDI 150 hp with XCELLENCE trim, 4Drive and manual gearbox priced at £27,425. To make my point about the advantage in terms of price and spec the Ateca has, the VW Tiguan top spec SEL with the same 150 hp



engine, 4Motion 4×4 drive and manual gearbox costs over £3,500 more. A top spec Nissan Qashqai Tekna with its most powerful diesel engine, a 1.6 litre 130hp unit, with manual gearbox and 4WD costs over £1,800 more.



The Ateca also handles really well, being agile with sharp steering and with little cornering body-roll so the well-respected VW Group's MQB platform continues to impress. For the most part the ride is comfortable but the handling can get fidgety over rough tarmac surfaces. Some shocks from potholes are not absorbed enough and there is some road noise intrusion but that could be caused by the 18-inch wheels fitted to my XCELLENCE test model. It has tended to be a trait with SEAT models of most types, due to the brand's sports image, that the cars are hard-riding but the handling needle-sharp. Moving down to an SE grade with 17-inch wheels will be more comforting and only marginally worse off for real-



life specification that is useful on a day-to-day basis. It will be a move more comfortable on your finances as well.

The 2.0 litre, TDI 150 hp turbodiesel engine with a six-speed manual gearbox and 4Drive all-wheel drive is a good package. The engine we already know and respect from other VW Group brands; it's the workhorse but that is not a disadvantage because it is smooth, gruff at times but quieter once on the move. It is also responsive producing 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm and even with the 4Drive traction will officially return 55.4 mpg in the Combined Cycle. On test my week-long driving spell got reasonably close to that figure with 49.7 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 129 g/km so VED road tax is £0 for the First Year rate and then £110 for following years. Company car drivers will pay 25% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

As for performance the top speed is 122 mph, the legal 70mph cruising top speed was effortlessly maintained and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time was 9.0 seconds - all pretty much as expected.

Just a word on the 4Drive system which uses the latest VW Group's Haldex multiplate clutch coupling system, which transfers drive to the rear wheels when needed. Drivers use the Drive Profile function fitted to SE grade models and above (except those fitted with the 1.0 litre TSI petrol engine), to select Normal, Sport, Eco and Individual modes. With the 4Drive function there are additional Snow and Off-road profiles, plus a Hill Descent Control function.

VERDICT

SEAT might be late joining the SUV/Crossover market but whilst the Ateca cannot recoup lost sales, it should bring in new customers to the brand. It will also retain SEAT customers who perhaps wanted to move from their Leon range of mid-sized hatchbacks to something more in-vogue.

For: High specification throughout the range at very competitive prices, proven VW Group



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mechanicals, sure-footed sharp handling, roomy.

Against: Firm ride at times, well laid out controls and instruments but a sombre looking dashboard and too much lack-lustre plastic trim on this top of the range version, not a generous standard warranty in mileage terms.



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

New SEAT Ateca 2.0 TDI 150 XCELLENCE 4Drive manual SUV.

Price: £27,425.



Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel, 150 hp, 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual with 4Drive.

Performance:

0-62mph: 9.0 seconds.

Top speed: 122 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 55.4 mpg, (49.7 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 129 g/km, VED £0/£110, BIK company car tax 25%.

Insurance Group: 16E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,363 mm (14.31 ft), W 1,841 mm (6.04 ft), H 1,625 mm (5.33 ft), boot/load space 485/1,579 litres (17.13/55.76 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,000 kg (4,409 lb), five doors/five seats.