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SEAT Leon ST estate – Road Test

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The new SEAT Leon ST estate – Small engine but big on space...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Launched in April this year the revised SEAT Leon range of SC three door coupé, five door hatchbacks and ST estates is available with nearly 70 derivatives and prices ranging from £17,455 to nearly £34,500. It is supported by a wide range of petrol and diesel engine options from the diminutive but impressive new 1.0 litre TSI three cylinder 115 hp turbo petrol to the 300 hp 2.0 TSI turbo petrol with DSG auto gearbox and 4Drive traction.

Just as wide ranging, depending on the engine and body style chosen, is the wide range of



core specification choices of S, SE Dynamic Technology, SE Technology, FR Technology, XCELLENCE and Cupra 300. There is also the minority selling Leon X-Perience rugged looking, raised suspension ST estate 4×4 variants with SE Technology and SE Lux spec with 2.0 TDi turbodiesel 150 and 184 hp engine options.

About 52% of Leon registrations will be down to fleets and 48% private buyers and the brand continues to attract younger buyers than the sector norm, typically in their mid-50s. Competitor models in addition to the Golf, Octavia and A3 include the best selling Ford Focus, Vauxhall Astra, Peugeot 308, Citroën C4, the all-new Honda Civic, Hyundai i30 and Kia Cee'd.

At the UK media launch for the revised Leon range the star engine proved to be the new VW Group 1.0 litre, TSI Ecomotive three cylinder 115 hp turbo petrol engine with its six-speed manual gearbox, but there is also a DSG auto gearbox option for an extra £1,250. When we motoring journalists attend these press launches where a multitude of engine options and body styles are available you only have time for a short 'snapshot' test drive just to get a flavour of what is available, and we try to opt for the best selling model where at all possible.



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Now for a much longer driving spell I chose that new 1.0 litre TSI 115 hp Ecomotive engine with its low 102 g/km CO2 figures, but with the 1,470 litre (51.91 cu.ft) load capacity ST estate body style and with SE Technology specification. This version would seem to me to be an ideal choice for both retail customers and the increasing numbers of fleet and business users switching from diesel to petrol engines because of 'dieselgate' and the future potential for inner-city travel restrictions, and the muted plans for higher taxes on diesel powered cars. The roomy ST estate is also a nice option for those who don't want to go down the congested Crossover/SUV route.

Core to the 1.0 litre engine's appeal is the refined and responsive performance with a top speed of 122 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 9.8 seconds. Even better are the low running costs due to its Combined Cycle fuel consumption of 64.2 mpg and the very low CO2



emissions of just 102 g/km. This means the new VED road tax costs are £140 every year and company car driver's Benefit-in-Kind tax is rated at 19%. During my week long test the overall figure of 46.2 mpg was recorded but on longer runs the average was 50.1 mpg. Insurance costs are competitive as well with a Group 15E rating.

I know it sounds small at 1.0 litres but this petrol engine but for most people has to be the best and most sensible choice. The engine is quiet, smooth and responsive with 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque - but this is delivered at 2,000 rpm, which is higher than many other new generation small petrol engines. To keep the engine in its happiest rev range, much use has to be made of the slick and easy to use six-speed manual gearbox. Whilst the engine will run quite happily and smoothly at low speeds in the higher gear ratios, ask for any acceleration and you need to drop a cog or two to get the turbo spinning to produce the torque needed. Once underway the engine pulled happily at mid-range speeds without resorting to selecting a lower gear. Cruising at 70 mph was effortless and quiet and handling was tightly controlled, but still agile - in keeping with the brand's sporting heritage.

Not so appealing was the very firm ride all the time and worse over poorer road surfaces due to the 15 mm (just over half an inch) lower suspension settings with the SE Technology spec level, ST body style and 16-inch alloy wheels shod with low rolling resistance tyres.

In all other respects the revised Leon models have hard to spot styling tweaks outside, a revised larger grille, a lower and wider bonnet, revised front bumper, re-styled wheels and so on. The changes outside really don't make the last Leon models look outdated. The SE Technology specification for the ST estate also has an Aerodynamic Package which consists of rear and side airflow spoilers, a closed radiator grille and low rolling resistance tyres. Inside the interior is refreshed with more standard equipment, also fewer switches and controls; it looks less cluttered, and the upholstery looks of better quality, but there are still areas of hard plastic trim. The Leon in all forms is built on the VW Group MQB platform but it's certainly not as spacious as the Skoda Octavia which also uses the same platform. There is enough space for five passengers with a roomy boot of 587 litres (20.73 cu.ft). Fold



down the rear seat backs and this goes up to 1,470 litres (51.91 cu.ft) so it's useful and practical for private car family use, and certainly versatile enough for business users. It's a good alternative to, and less bulky than, the current trend Crossover/SUV type vehicles.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Where the latest Leon models are most improved is with the levels of specification, and most of these additions and improvements are given over to the latest safety and driving assistance aids and infotainment and connectivity functions. It is the usual case though that despite the overall additions of spec throughout the range, the more you pay the more you get. The secret to buying from this huge latest Leon model range is to choose what you really need in terms of engine, performance and specification, not want you don't need.

Air conditioning, electrically operated windows and door mirrors, 8.0-inch touchscreen, DAB radio, sat-nav, electric parking brake, hill start, electronic differential are just some of the items included in the user and cost friendly-friendly SE Technology level of specification. However my test car had more extra cost options such as the £230 auto headlights and wipers and extra LED interior lighting. It also had the £1,025 Full LED Headlights pack which also added LED daytime running lights, LED front fog lights, LED rear lights and even LED number plate lights. Dark tinted windows added another £180 to the price and the Full Link option costing £150 brings MirrorLink, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity functions.

VERDICT

The Leon extended family of models has most customer requirements covered in its sales sector and the ST sporty estate is certainly worth consideration. But with a huge line-up of models, engines and specification options, selecting the right one might take some time.

For: Refreshed styling, more equipment, better value, huge range to choose from, great new fuel frugal tax friendly 1.0 petrol engine.



Against: Select the engine and spec level you actually need otherwise some versions can be too costly, firm ride.



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

SEAT Leon ST 5-door estate, SE Technology, 1.0 TSI 115 hp, six speed manual.

Price: £21,480 (£23,315 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection Ecomotive



petrol, 115 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six speed manual.

Performance: 122 mph, 0-62 mph 9.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 64.2 mpg (46.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 102 g/km, VED road tax £140, BiK company car tax 19%.
Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,246 mm (13.93 ft), W 1,816 mm (5.96 ft), H 1,454 mm (4.77 ft), boot/load space 587 to 1,470 litres (20.73 to 51.91 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.