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Skoda Karoq SUV – Road Test

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Author: David Miles

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Skoda's new mid-sized Karoq SUV - already an award winner...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

With the arrival of so many new SUVs, Crossovers and 4x4s it is easy to be confused on which is the best and most suitable model to buy. One thing for sure is that the availability of such vehicles has grown out of all traditional proportions as manufacturers chase sales.

The mid-sized SUV sector has grown faster than the small SUV/Crossover market and generally these mid-sized SUVs have caused a significant fall in sales of conventional C-segment lower medium family hatchbacks. Customers are seemingly being seduced by the must-have fashionable SUV styling and the extra space and the seating and load carrying



combinations. Manufacturers are expecting the mid-sized SUV segment to be worth around 300,000 sales in the UK this year even though the new car market is shrinking.



The latest mid-sized SUV is the Skoda Karoq which, while not a direct replacement, does take over from the very popular Yeti range in the Czech brand. The new Karoq's competitors will include the sister models SEAT Ateca and VW Tiguan, the high selling Peugeot 3008, the market leader Nissan Qashqai, Ford Kuga, Hyundai Tucson, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Renault Kadjar, Mitsubishi ASX and Toyota RAV4.

The Karoq five door, five-seater SUV is effectively a scaled down version of the award winning Skoda Kodiaq large five and seven seater SUV and true to form the Karoq has just picked up its first UK award in the 2018 What Car? Magazine's 'Oscars', being judged Best Family SUV in the £20k to £30k sector.



The Karoq range is priced from £20,875 to £31,690 and perhaps more relevant are the PCP personal contract purchase finance details where a new Karoq can be had over a 48-month repayment period from £217 per month and that includes a £1,500 deposit contribution from Skoda.



As Skoda is a member of the Volkswagen Group of brands the Karoq uses much of the technology, engine, components and platform from a host of other models in the Audi, SEAT, Skoda and VW model ranges. It uses another version of the highly rated MQB scalable platform and the most popular and new TSI and TDI engines.



The Karoq has three core specification levels, SE, SE L and Edition and there is another aimed specifically at fleet buyers – the SE Technology. There are four engine options – the 1.0 litre TSI three cylinder 115 hp turbo petrol, the new 1.5 TSI four cylinder 150 hp unit with cylinder on demand technology, the 1.6 TDI 115 hp turbodiesel and the 2.0 TDI 150 hp turbodiesel. All are available with manual and DSG automatic transmissions but only the 2.0 TDI unit has 4WD, the others are 2WD.

It is not usual for the VW Group brands in the UK to talk about sales prediction numbers but Skoda appears to be different with the new Karoq. They are forecasting around 17,500 sales this year, 60% of them to retail customers and 40% to fleet and user-chooser business customers. The best-selling single version will be the SE model fitted with the new 1.5 TSI 150hp turbo petrol engine, and priced at £22,225.

The Karoq is built in the Czech Republic at Skoda's state of the art facility which also builds the award winning and highly rated Superb and Kodiaq ranges. This facility can build up to 280,000 vehicles a year.

Visually outside and within, the Karoq is a scaled-down version of the Kodiaq large SUV, but being smaller doesn't mean it is less in its appeal or in its high level of the latest infotainment, connectivity, safety and driving support functions. All models come with LED rear lights, front driving lights, dual-zone climate control, aluminium alloy wheels and a five star NCAP safety rating, with Front Assist with City Emergency Braking, plus a full set of airbags.

Its scaled down proportions from the Kodiaq still mean a useful overall length of 4,382 mm (14.38 ft), a width of 1,841 mm (6.04 ft) and a height of 1,603 mm (5.26 ft) for 2WD versions and 1,607 mm (5.27 ft) for the 4WD derivatives. It's roomy as well, something most Skoda models are noted for.

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In addition to five seats there is a useful boot. SE models have a boot capacity of 521 litres



(18.40 cu.ft) with the rear seats in place, increasing to 1,630 litres (57.56 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded down. For SE L and Edition models equipped with Varioflex seating the luggage space varies between 479 and 588 litres (16.92 and 20.77 cu.ft) with the sliding individual seats in place, and this space increases to 1,810 litres (63.92 cu.ft) with all three seats removed. Each of the three rear seats are separate so each can be in position, folded or unclipped and removed to maximise versatility.

With its very competitive pricing, specification is important. The SE models have 17-inch alloy wheels, privacy glass, LED rear lights, dual-zone climate control, front assist, pedestrian monitor, and driver fatigue sensor as standard. Front assist (radar scanning of the space in front of the car) and automatic braking pedestrian monitor are also included as standard.

The SE L models add additional features, including 18-inch aluminium alloy wheels, Amundsen satellite navigation with 8-inch touchscreen display, Smartlink+, keyless entry and start/stop, full LED headlights with adaptive front light system, heated front seats, and Alcantara upholstery. Customers opting for the SE L also benefit from a colour multifunction trip computer, rear view camera and front and rear parking sensors as standard.

The range-topping Edition trim offers 19-inch alloy wheels, panoramic sunroof, metallic paint and leather upholstery, Columbus satellite navigation with 9.2-inch touchscreen display and gesture control, electrically operated boot, LED ambient lighting, lane assist, blind spot protection with rear traffic alert and traffic sign recognition.

To meet the specific demands of fleet customers, the SE Technology trim grade features 17-inch alloy wheels, Amundsen satellite navigation with 8-inch touchscreen display, Smartlink+ and Infotainment Online for one year. Adaptive cruise control and front and rear parking sensors are also included as standard on the SE Technology trim.

Like the sharp and crisp exterior styling lines, the interior follows the same theme, all well laid out, all logical and it's all well put together. There is a mixture of soft feel trim and



some harder areas of plastic but it looks and feels pleasing. The driving position is good with ample visibility and it's relatively roomy for rear seat legroom and of course the load and seating combinations are clever.

As for ride quality, the Karoq has a softer suspension setting than its competitor VW Group SEAT Ateca which, like most of that brand's models, errs towards the firmer sporty side of ride quality. Although the ride comfort was compliant, impacts from potholes were transmitted into the cabin, more so from the rear than the front suspension and it fidgeted at the rear wheels over poorer tarmac surfaces. But it felt nimble enough with accurate steering and well controlled bodyroll during cornering.



My test drive model was the Karoq SE L with the best selling new 1.5 litre, TSI cylinder on demand 150 hp turbo petrol engine mated with the seven-speed DSG auto gearbox and with its 2WD system, and the price is a competitive £25,815. For those customers wanting a six-



speed manual gearbox the same spec model with the same engine costs £24,515.

This clever new engine, also available in other VW Group models, uses the latest generation of active cylinder technology which means that cylinders two and three are switched off for a short time when power output is not needed, during deceleration or driving on a very light throttle between 1,400 and 4,000 rpm and up to 70 mph. Skoda claims this system saves half a litre of petrol per 62 miles (100km). The switch between two and four cylinders is seamless and immediate in moving from low to fast acceleration requirements.

The fact that this unit provides 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from just 1,500 rpm gives it a very wide powerband so it's responsive and smooth right from low through to high speeds, and great mid-range for providing brisk overtaking speeds. The top speed is 126 mph and the zero to 62 mph acceleration time is impressive at just 8.6 seconds. Mated with the fast-changing auto gearbox the Combined Cycle fuel economy is an official 50.4 mpg and during my week of test driving over a mixture of long and short runs, winding country roads and some in-town travel the real-life figure was lower than expected at 40.2 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 127 g/km which means VED road tax is £160 First Year rate then £140 Standard rate.

Unless you are a high mileage fleet or business user this engine makes more sense than a diesel unit, but if you need the 4WD model then it has to be the 2.0 litre TDI 150 hp engine. As good as the other lower cost petrol engine option is, the 1.0 litre TSI 115 hp three cylinder turbo petrol unit, it will not have the 'muscle' to provide a fuss-free drive as it will need lots of gearchanging to keep it in its optimum powerband and in real-life probably it won't be as fuel-efficient because it will be worked harder.

The only glitch during my week long test drive was that the windscreen wipers failed on the very last evening the vehicle was with me. Fortunately the rain had stopped and the system failed during a wash/wipe function. These components are widely used throughout the VW Group of brands so I suspect it was a one-off unusual component failure, inconvenient yes, off-putting no! As it turned out it was a loose connection with the electric motor and easily



fixed, said Skoda.

VERDICT

Skoda keeps coming up with award winning roomy, well equipped, well priced and distinctive new models and the Karoq is their latest 'winner' in a very competitive market sector.

For: Sharp styling, nice kerb appeal, clever flexible seating and load carrying combinations, well equipped, impressive new 1.5 TSI engine, attractive pricing.

Against: No spare wheel as standard, ungenerous warranty, slightly disappointing real-life fuel economy, windscreen wipers failed just before the end of my test driving period.



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

Skoda Karoq SE L 1.5 TSI 150 hp, DSG auto, 2WD.

Price: £25,815.

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, 2-4 cylinder on demand TSI turbo petrol, 150 hp, 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, seven speed DSG auto transmission with Sport mode + driving mode selection.



Performance: 126 mph, 0-62 mph 8.6 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 50.4 mpg (40.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 127 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 24%.

Insurance Group: 15E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,382 mm (14.38 ft), W 1,841 mm (6.04 ft), H 1,603 mm (5.26 ft), wheelbase 2,638 mm (8.65 ft), boot/load space 479 to 1,810 litres (16.92 to 63.92 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,700 kg (3,748 lb), five doors/five seats.