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Skoda Rapid Spaceback (also Octavia Elegance, brief drive)

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Author: Kim Henson

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Kim Henson welcomes Skoda's attractive newcomer...



Refreshing, neat styling is a hallmark of the new Skoda Rapid Spaceback.



In recent years the Skoda company has been enjoying considerable success in the U.K. Its distinctive models have plenty of appeal for British buyers seeking competent dynamic performance, practicality and true value for their money.

As a result, Skoda sales are increasing at a rate much faster than those of the U.K. market when viewed as a whole, helping the company to achieve a market share of 2.8 per cent in 2013 (up from 2.6 per cent the year before).

In addition, the cars are finding homes in vast numbers around the world, particularly in China, Russia and Germany. (Interestingly, one million Skodas have been produced in China during the last six years...).

Putting things in perspective, the U.K. market (currently with 134 dealers, but with a new dealership line-up coming to fruition in 2014-15) is the fourth strongest in the world for the company in terms of sales. Approximately 45 per cent of the Skodas sold in Britain go to the fleet market.

VW AUDI CONNECTIONS

It is widely known that the association of Skoda with VW and Audi has helped to provide economies of scale as far as the drivetrains are concerned, and, among prospective buyers, the link has also helped to generate a healthy perception of good quality, borne out by good reliability and performance.

What is less well known is that Skoda produces all the 1.3 and 1.4 litre TSI power units for the VW Group, and in total, since 1899, Skoda has built some 11 million engines.

NEW RAPID SPACEBACK

Against this very rosy background, Skoda's attractively styled Rapid Spaceback has made its debut, joining the already popular Rapid line-up.



The new, compact family hatchback has been designed with everyday practicality in mind, in terms of passenger accommodation (including what is claimed to be best in its market sector rear seat leg and head room), luggage space (with a huge, 415 litre capacity boot – extending to 1,380 litres with the rear seats folded) and frugal running costs. With low CO2 emissions (from 99g/km, for the Greenline version), resulting in zero to low rates of road tax, plus genuinely good fuel consumption, the Spaceback promises to be a relatively inexpensive vehicle to operate.

Buyer options include four trim levels (S, SE, Elegance and Greenline), plus a number of ‘personalisation’ aspects, including a panoramic glass roof and extended tailgate glass. In addition to a raft of safety/driver aid technologies, useful standard features include a multitude of storage areas within the car, one of which is an under-seat compartment to house a reflective safety vest.

There are five power units from which to choose, with outputs from 86 to 122 PS. Petrol engines start with the 86 PS 1.2 TSI, while for those seeking faster performance, there’s the turbocharged 105 PS version of that engine. The most powerful unit offered in the Spaceback is the 1.4 TSI, which develops 122 PS, and is mated as standard to a seven speed DSG (‘Direct Shift Gearbox’) twin clutch automatic transmission.

Diesel engine choices are between the 1.6 TDI developing 90 PS, or the 105 PS version. The Greenline variant is fitted with the 90 PS engine, and also incorporates brake system energy recovery and Start-stop technology, plus aerodynamic aids built into the bodywork, and tyres with low rolling resistance, to optimise emissions and fuel consumption figures.

Spaceback prices start at £14,340, rising to £18,640.



There's plenty of head and leg room in the rear seats of the Spaceback, with wide-opening doors too.

ON THE ROAD

I recently sampled two Spacebacks, both in well-equipped SE guise, and in both cases I was particularly impressed by the spacious interior (with its neat and functional dashboard design), the wide-opening doors (including the rears), and the very generous luggage accommodation, within a sensibly-shaped compartment. Mention should be made of the handy storage boxes fitted behind the rear wheel arches, and the bag hooks also found in the boot. A useful Spaceback option is a double-sided boot floor, enabling owners to fit the floor rubber-side up when carrying such things as muddy wellies, or carpeted-side uppermost for 'normal' luggage.

I started by driving the 86 PS 1.2 litre petrol model, with a five speed manual gearbox. While not a roadburner, nevertheless it was a willing performer.

In theory the top speed is 112 mph, and the car will reach 62 mph from rest in 11.7 seconds, but more importantly for most buyers, the official 'Combined' fuel consumption figure of 55.4 mpg should mean infrequent stops to refuel. (In my experience, in real-life operation Skodas consistently achieve close to the official mpg figures too). Its CO2 rating of 119 g/km translates into a low rate of road tax.

The test car provided a quiet, smooth, comfortable ride, adequate performance and positive cornering. When cruising at fast road speeds (70 mph in fifth gear equates to approximately 2,600 rpm), the car felt mechanically refined and there was plenty of power available for hill-climbing and overtaking, when required.

A point of note: I was impressed by the very clear, easy to read speedometer in this car, helped by the fact that it is calibrated in 10 mph increments up to 80 mph, and in 20 mph increments at higher speeds. A sensible and useful innovation, I feel.



What a sensible speedometer... Unmistakably and clearly marked, and in 10 mph increments up to 80 mph. Well done Skoda.



These five spoke 'Carme' sports wheels are part of the SE specification.

This version is priced at £15,480 (plus options on the test vehicle, bringing the figure up to £16,975) and I feel that this represents good value at today's prices.

I next took to the wheel of a 1.6 litre TDI, producing 90 PS. Again this version proved to be an eager, refined performer, and it also provided plenty of low speed pulling power. The seven speed DSG automatic transmission (twin clutch, 'Direct Shift Gearbox') on the test vehicle was easy to operate, and incorporated a 'hill hold' control system.



Claimed performance figures for this version show a top speed of 113 mph, a nought to 62 mph acceleration time of 12.1 seconds, and 'Combined' fuel consumption of 62.8 mpg (with CO2 emissions of 118g/km).

The asking price for this model is £18,440 (boosted by options to £19,935 on the car as tested).



This is the underbonnet view of the 1.2 litre TSI petrol engine; there's much more room around the engine than is the case with many modern cars.



The boot is cavernous, and incorporated within it are additional storage compartments, plus bag hooks.



Each of the Spacebacks I sampled had a steel 'temporary' space-saving spare wheel (a £75 option) housed within the well beneath the boot floor.



VERDICT

In my opinion the Spaceback is an effective and dynamic family car, bristling with practicality and competitively priced.

I was highly impressed by the 1.6 TDI version, but for buyers wishing to save about £3,000 on its asking price, the 86 PS 1.2 litre TSI (petrol-powered) offers similar versatility and competence; well worth considering (although overall fuel costs may be expected to be a little higher than with the diesel engine).



Wrap-around lamps are visible from the sides as well as from the front of the car.



WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF (Versions sampled)

Rapid Spaceback 1.2 TSI 86 PS

Engine: 1598cc four cylinder, direct injection petrol

Transmission: Five speed manual

Power: 86 PS at 4,800 rpm

Torque: 160 Nm (118 lb.ft) @ 1,500 to 3,500 rpm

0-62 mph: 11.7 sec

Top speed: 112 mph

Fuel consumption:

(‘Urban’): 43.5 mpg

(‘Extra Urban’): 64.2 mpg

(‘Combined’): 55.4 mpg

CO2 emissions: 119 g/km

‘On the road’ price (not including options): £15,480

(as sampled, with options, £16,975).

Rapid Spaceback 1.6 TDI 90 PS DSG

Engine: 1598cc four cylinder, turbocharged direct injection diesel

Transmission: Seven speed DSG (twin clutch, ‘Direct Shift Gearbox’)

Power: 90 PS at 4,200 rpm

Torque: 230 Nm (170 lb.ft) @ 1,500 to 2,500 rpm

0-62 mph: 12.1 sec

Top speed: 113 mph

Fuel consumption:



('Urban'): 50.4 mpg

('Extra Urban'): 72.4 mpg

('Combined'): 62.8 mpg

CO2 emissions: 118 g/km

'On the road' price (not including options): £18,440

(as sampled, with options, £19,935).

BRIEF DRIVE:

OCTAVIA ELEGANCE



The Skoda Octavia 2.0 TDI 150 PS Elegance is a well-equipped, smart-looking, economical to run and dynamically competent family car with a realistic price tag.

While attending the launch of the Rapid Spaceback, I had the opportunity to briefly re-acquaint myself with one of the larger models in the Skoda range, the well-respected Octavia.

I tried the 2.0 TDI 150 PS version, in high specification 'Elegance' form, and with a six speed DSG twin clutch automatic transmission. This is priced at £23,240 (increased by extra-cost options to £29,315 on the example I tried).

As with Octavias I have driven in the past, this comfortable, spacious Skoda proved to be



smooth-running, lively in acceleration and an effortless cruiser; it felt solid and safe too.

It promises to be frugal on fuel, with an official 'Combined' consumption figure of 62.8 miles per gallon (during my short test run, without trying I achieved 52.9 mpg).

The manufacturer's figures show a top speed of 134 mph, having passed 62 mph from a standstill in just 8.3 seconds. The CO2 rating is 119g/km.

VERDICT

This inspiring Octavia represents a cost-effective yet enjoyable buy. It's good to drive, economical, and provides comfort and space in plenty for a family.

CLASSIC SKODAS TOO... While attending the Rapid Spaceback launch, I was lucky enough to drive two classic Skodas, dating from the 1920s and 1960s respectively... The company has an illustrious heritage. Like to find out more? [Click here to be transported back in time!](#)