Sporty SEAT Leon Cupra Estate – Road Test

Published: September 17, 2018

Author:

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/sporty-seat-leon-cupra-estate-road-test/

The Leon Cupra 300 hp ST estate provides pace and space…

…says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

SEAT's Leon range of mid-sized C-segment models covers SC three door hatchbacks, Leon five door hatchbacks and ST five door estates, with a long list of 1.4 to 2.0 litre engines, both petrol and diesel, and with a comprehensive level of specifications with prices covering a huge scale from £19,555 through to £33,175.

Right at the top of each of the three body styles are the Cupra high performance models

with their 2.0 litre 300 hp TSI turbo petrol engine. All but one version offers front wheel drive with manual or DSG automatic gearboxes but there is one more model that outshines those. It’s the Cupra ST 300hp DSG auto with 4Drive traction and that carries the top £33,175 price.

Now Cupra has been the significant performance model for various SEAT model ranges but at the end of this year it becomes CUPRA – a brand in its own right. The first model will be the CUPRA Ateca mid-sized SUV. Although becoming a brand in its own right, CUPRA models will still be sold through SEAT’s UK dealer network but with a dedicated area in each showroom. The move is to promote to enthusiast drivers the SEAT brand’s sporting heritage. SEAT is the Spanish arm of the Volkswagen Group of brands.

Before Cupra becomes CUPRA, I got behind the wheel for a test drive week with the ST 300 hp estate with the six-speed auto DSG gearbox and 4Drive traction. This flagship model of the Leon range received an upgraded 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbo petrol TSI engine for the 2018 model year. It gained a 10 hp increase in power but more importantly for mid range driving responses, 30 Nm (22 lb.ft) of extra torque, now 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) from 1,800 rpm. Top speed is a more than healthy, but legally unusable on UK roads, at 155 mph, and the zero to 62 mph acceleration dash takes just 4.9 seconds. The 4Drive system capitalises on that extra power and torque to provide added traction.

As for running costs, well the official Combined Cycle fuel economy figure is 39.2 mpg and my week of motoring, a blend of busy traffic congested roads and some quieter routes allowing more spirited driving, returned 33.2 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 164 g/km, the

VED First Year road tax costs £515 before the £140 Standard rate for year two onwards is applied. Those lucky company car drivers, who might be allowed a sporting estate for business, will pay 33% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is group 33E and warranty an ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.

Being an estate perhaps the more important figures for the Leon ST estates concern dimensions as it is potentially a load-lugger, even in its Cupra high performance form. The wheelbase is the same as the Leon five door hatchbacks but the rear overhang is 264 mm (10.39 in) longer to increase load space. With the three rear seats in position there is a 587 litre (20.73 cu.ft) boot but fold down the rear seat backs and this goes up to a useful 1,470 litres (51.91 cu.ft).

For ease of use there are seat back release handles in the boot, there are 13 cubby holes for

storage around the cabin, a 12V socket in the boot, a retractable rear shelf and storage space under the boot floor. Up front the interior has sports seats bearing the Cupra logo and there is the usual array of controls, switches and 8.0-inch touchscreen, all very similar to other SEAT models and other VW Group brands. The driving position is good, the visibility excellent thanks to the fairly slim pillars around the estate's body and the ride comfortable if the Comfort driving mode is selected. More enthusiastic driving probably requires the pilot to select a Sport setting which reduces the small element of suspension 'bounce' on undulating road surfaces and sharpens up the acceleration response and auto gearbox change points.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The handling is well-balanced despite the vehicle's added body length, due to the fact that it uses the highly competent VW Group MQB platform and the wheelbase is the same as the five door hatchback version. Pushing the nose into corners at speed and the grip and steering are sharp and predictable with no understeer with the rear end following accurately the chosen line without oversteer, hence my comment about balance handling and grip. The 4Drive system pushes torque to each of the four wheels as grip is required either for straight line acceleration or during fast cornering. It's a seamless operation and the same smoothness of operation comes from the six speed DSG fast-changing auto gearbox.

When it comes to the competition in this 'hot' medium sized estate car market sector there isn't too much of it, and most of that comes from other VW Group brands in the form of the VW Golf R 2.0-litre 310 hp estate or the roomier and cheaper Skoda vRS Octavia estate 2.0 litre 230 hp. Although there is a new Ford Focus on its way the Focus ST 2.0T EcoBoost 250 hp models could still be available and there are the less practical five door hatchbacks such as the Renault Megane RS 1.8 litre 280 hp or the Honda Civic Type R 2.0 VTEC 320 hp, so the SEAT Leon Cupra 300 ST TSI DSG 4Drive has a more or less high speed clear run for sales although what competition there is, is significant.

But for around the same money you can have the larger Vauxhall Insignia Sports Tourer estate with either 2.0 turbo petrol 260 hp or 2.0 Bi-Turbo diesel 210 hp engines, both with 4WD and both with automatic transmissions. Slightly less power granted – but with lots more space and still impressive performance.

VERDICT

However… If size doesn't matter in terms of useful practicality, the rakish looking Leon ST estate is still very fit for purpose and the Cupra performance and specification enhancements should boost its appeal for a small but significantly important number of enthusiast drivers.

For: High performance, well controlled handing, excellent 4Drive all wheel drive grip, comfortable ride, well equipped, limited competition in its niche sector.

Against: Doesn't have price on its side, high running costs, limited appeal for mainstream buyers of mid-sized estates, ungenerous warranty.

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

SEAT Leon ST Cupra 300 TSI 4Drive, six speed DSG auto, mid-sized estate.

Price: £33,175 (£35,995 as tested with options).

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder TSI turbocharged petrol engine with 300

hp and 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque from 1,800 rpm, six speed DSG auto gearbox with 4Drive traction.

Performance: 155 mph, 0–62mph 4.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 39.2 mpg (33.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 164 g/km, VED First Year rate road tax £515 then £140 Standard rate, BiK company car tax rate 33%.

Insurance Group: 33E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,548 mm (14.92 ft), W 1,816 mm (5.96 ft), H 1,431 mm (4.69 ft), wheelbase 2,631 mm (8.63 ft), boot/load space 587 to 1,470 litres (20.73 to 51.91 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.