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Volkswagen T-Roc – First impressions

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Funky and glitzy looking – VW's T-Roc compact SUV

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Yet another model from a company that is thriving now in the UK. This time it's the VW T-Roc entering the German company's 190 strong dealership this week. Television advertising with the T-Roc's 'Bam the Ram' and advertising strapline 'Born Confident' launches on Boxing Day. It should make you smile in a sheepish sort of way.

The T-Roc sees Volkswagen enter a new market segment for them with this eye-catching and sporty looking new model, with styling which is somewhat of a departure from most of



their conservative designs. The T-Roc is positioned beneath the established and popular Tiguan SUV and above the forthcoming new T-Cross small SUV due next year. Of course at the top end of their SUV range is the heavyweight Touareg 4×4, due to be updated next year. Also waiting in the wings is the Tiguan Allspace seven-seater SUV which also launches early next year.

Whilst a few deliveries of the new T-Roc to early adopter customers might trickle out of the showroom doors this month it will be January before main deliveries start and the model range has just been expanded with the addition of two more engine options. Prices start from a competitive £18,950 and currently range up to a costly £31,485, plus of course there are lots of extra cost personalisation options and specification packs to increase the prices.

But Scott Fisher, VW UK's Product Affairs Manager, said at the media launch this week, we shouldn't get too hung-up about whether prices are too high as over 80% of retail new car sales are bought with finance packages. It's the amount of the monthly payment that a buyer can afford that counts as well as the size of a deposit and length of the repayment period. A move from a lower to a higher powered engine or a higher grade of trim might not be that more costly for the monthly payback bill. And of course there is always the value of any trade-in to be taken into account as well as any promotional finance contributions VW might choose to offer. Currently the monthly PCP rates start from £185 for four years with a £500 deposit contribution from VW.

The specification line-up at launch, depending on the engine chosen, is currently S, SE, Design; SEL and R-Line will arrive later next year. Currently the petrol engine choices are 1.0 litre TSI 115 hp manual 2WD, the new 1.5 litre TSI EVO cylinder-on-demand 150 hp with 2WD manual and the 2.0 TSI 190 hp seven-speed automatic with 4Motion 4WD as standard. For those customers wanting a diesel engine, initially it is a 2.0 TDI 150 hp manual with 4Motion. A 1.6 litre TDI 115 hp diesel unit will be added next year but no transmission choice or price indication are currently listed.



Mike Orford, Head of Press and Public Relations, said the most popular variant is expected to be the 1.0 TSI 115 hp turbocharged petrol engine, six-speed manual with SE trim and equipment priced at £20,425. He added that although Volkswagen was new to this sector of the SUV market they expect petrol-powered models will be the choice of 80% of UK customers, SE will be the most popular choice taking 40% of sales, 75% of customers will be retail buyers and the 4Motion 4WD models will take less than 10% of sales. When it came to the important question of total sales, he said "It is difficult to give a prediction because of the overall falling sales of new cars in the UK, but we are expecting the T-Roc to make a significant contribution to our performance, quickly joining the top-selling Golf with over 72,000 sales last year, the Polo with 54,500 sales, and closely followed by the Tiguan. Sales will go mainly to conquest customers." Pundits are predicting at least 20,000 T-Roc UK registrations in 2018.



The T-Roc uses Volkswagen Group's volume-selling MQB scalable length platform, the same as the Audi Q2, SEAT Ateca and Skoda Karoq. In essence the T-Roc is an SUV version of the VW Golf except it has sportier and chunkier exterior styling, a taller stance and more interior space, especially headroom. Other competitors include the Peugeot 3008, Vauxhall Mokka X, Ford Kuga - and it's slightly longer than the other compact SUVs that include the Kia Stonic, Hyundai Kona, Nissan Juke, Renault Captur, MG GS, Citroën C3 Aircross and Ford EcoSport.

The wide front and rear tracks, the long wheelbase stance and steeply raked forward rear C-pillar with sharp styling lines running from the front to rear of the body, gives the T-Roc an athletic appearance. There are the usual plastic protection strips along the sills and lower front and rear bumpers, which together with the raised ride-height all emphasise the vehicle's sporting SUV style. The T-Roc measures 4,234 mm (13.89 ft) in length with short front and rear overhangs, but its 252 mm (0.83 ft) shorter than the Tiguan and it has a 2,590 mm (8.50 ft) wheelbase so rear seat legroom is family-friendly to some extent. The width is 1,819 mm (5.97 ft) and its height is 1,573 mm (5.16 ft). Luggage space is ample and VW claim for the five-seat car that it has one of largest luggage compartments in its class - measuring 445 litres (15.72 cu.ft) when loaded up to the top of the rear seat backrests and with the 60/40 split rear seats folded this goes up to 1,290 litres (45.56 cu.ft).

Volkswagen's Head of Design, Klaus Bischoff, said: "We have created another authentic SUV with the new T-Roc. In launching this crossover we are also bringing a very expressive, even 'sassy', design to the streets. This emotional component makes it likeable. The T-Roc is therefore equally well suited for the urban world as it is for great adventures."

So it looks good on the streets with a bright kerb appeal for the driveway, add in the 'down with the kids' T-Roc branding and the new model range is certainly a breakaway from the conservative styling of most VW models, and should appeal to the young and young at heart. Although manufacturers always look for new 'conquest' customers, probably the T-Roc will attract current VW Golf owners as it offers more interior space, coupled with that latest must-have SUV styling.



Inside, the youthful design continues but worryingly the quality of the hard and not soft-touch plastic and vinyl trim areas don't match what we now associate with other new compact SUVs – it's more budget than posh despite its near premium price structure. However the option of ColourPad inserts for the dashboard, centre console surrounds and door panels brighten the overall look of the vehicle's interior. That said the standard finish dashboard design, touchscreen and other controls are all well known from other VW models as well as the family brands of Audi, SEAT, and Skoda.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Standard-fit items across the range include autonomous emergency braking and pedestrian detection, Lane Assist, 2Zone electronic climate control, front and rear electric windows, Composition Media infotainment system with eight-inch colour touch-screen, on-board computer, Bluetooth telephone and audio connection with Android Auto, DAB radio, USB connectivity and charging, 4 x 20W speakers, minimum 16-inch alloy wheels, electronic parking brake and comprehensive passive and active safety equipment. Also available is a 10.3-inch Active Info Display which replaces the conventional dials in the instrument binnacle behind the steering wheel, and is standard fit on SEL and above spec cars, as is the Discover Navigation system. The best-selling SE spec additions include 17-inch alloy wheels, body coloured bumpers, roof rails, Car-Net App Connect with Apple CarPlay, Google Android Auto and Mirror Link connectivity, electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors, puddle lights, adaptive cruise control with radar-controlled distance monitoring and front and rear parking sensors. And so the spec increases through the new Design level to SEL and, in the future, R-Line.

Personalisation and additional styling trim are key elements in today's new car market and the T-Roc is not short of those either, but consider what options are actually needed, not just nice-to-have, otherwise the cost escalates considerably.

Potentially, with the T-Roc being an SUV, one of the major choices to be made by a customer, depending where they live – town or country, will be 2WD or 4Motion traction.



The bad news is that 4Motion is only available on the top and most expensive specification SEL models, and only with the 2.0 litre TSI 190 hp petrol engine with its DSG auto gearbox, priced at £31,485, or the 2.0 litre TDI 150 hp turbodiesel with a six-speed manual gearbox, and priced at £28,345 – which probably prices them out of the mainstream compact SUV market.

It is likely that most customers, particularly retail buyers, will stay away from the diesel engine option for the reasons we all know about and opt for the 1.0 litre TSI 115 hp turbocharged three cylinder petrol unit or the new 1.5 litre TSI 150 hp EVO turbo petrol engine with cylinder on demand technology. My choice would be the 1.0 TSI with SE specification, priced at £20,425 – which seems quite enough to pay given it's yet another compact SUV with 2WD. It has most of the important spec needed on a daily basis. Fortunately the VW Group's Driving Profile Selection with Eco, Normal, Sport or Individual modes, standard on SEL, is one of the more attractively priced options, so to add that very useful driving tool to an SE model only adds another £160 to the vehicle's price. The Discover Navigation system will cost an extra £1,130; it's good but some might consider it not to be worthwhile and opt instead for an after-market portable sat-nav system or the navigation function from their mobile phone.

The little 1.0 litre TSI triple-cylinder turbo petrol engine we know well from other VW Group models. It is a little gem but whilst its 115 hp seems modest, the 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm makes it very driveable and responsive. Add in cost-effective and it is easy to see why this unit is predicted to be the most popular choice. Matched to a six-speed manual gearbox, top speed is 116 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 10.1 seconds and the Combined Cycle fuel economy is officially 55.4 mpg. However on my brief test driving over a mix of country roads and dual carriageways it returned just 43 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 117 g/km VED road tax is £160 First Year rate, reducing to £140 Standard rate for Year Two onwards. Company car Benefit-in-Kind tax is 22% and insurance is a relatively attractive group 11E.



The first driving impressions I got from my brief test was the really sharp handling and fast-acting steering, with plenty of front wheel cornering grip, yet all retaining a really comfortable and compliant ride. To my mind it is the best-handling and most comfortable compact SUV available today. The handling and ride quality didn't appear to be any different in the other more powerful models I tried.

I also had a test drive with the new 1.5 litre, TSI four cylinder-on-demand turbo petrol engine with 150 hp and noticeable more torque of 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) available from just 1,500 rpm. This of course improves performance and response over the 1.0 litre engine but costs £1,775 more to buy with the same SE specification. The automatic switching from four cylinders to two during de-acceleration isn't noticeable, it's smooth and quiet with more



acceleration without the need to drop down a gear or two to pick up speed. The zero to 62 mph acceleration time is noticeably quicker at 8.3 seconds and the top speed is 127 mph. The Combined Cycle figure is 53.3 mpg and on my test drive using the same route as the 1.0 litre unit it was 40 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 120 g/km so VED costs are still £160/£140 but BiK goes up to 23% and insurance increases to group 16E.

With no diesel powered T-Roc models at the media launch, not yet in the country, I also tried the 2.0 litre TSI 190 hp petrol engine which comes as standard with a seven-speed DSG auto gearbox and 4Motion traction. The current top level SEL spec is standard with this variant and it costs the highest price in the range of £31,485. With 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm the engine is a good match with the slick-changing auto gearbox. Top speed is 134 mph and zero to 62 mph takes just 7.2 seconds. The Combined Cycle figure is 41.5 mpg and again driving the same route as the other two models my figure was 32.5 mpg. The CO2 emissions are 155 g/km so VED goes up to £500 First year rate and then £140 Standard rate. The BiK rating is 30% and insurance is group 23E. Apart from the advantage of 4Motion all wheel drive and a higher level of equipment, the price puts this model well out of the reach of most customers in this sector unless 4WD is a must, pity 4Motion cannot be had with lower powered and specification models.



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VERDICT

Overall the VW T-Roc might be late to the compact SUV market but there is still time for it to make a big impression and potentially steal sales from other brands, if not VW's own Golf Hatchback and the Tiguan slightly larger SUV model.

For: Sharp sporty styling lines, distinctive up-market kerb appeal, excellent handling and sharp accurate steering, very comfortable ride, roomy interior with more space than a Golf, lots of personalisation options and bodywork colours.

Against: Lack of soft-feel interior plastic panels and trim, only higher spec models have the best technology, 4Motion only available on the top SEL spec versions, top spec models look expensive, not a very generous warranty.



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

Volkswagen T-Roc SE 1.0 TSI 115 hp, six speed manual. (Best selling model).

Price: £20,425 (£22,555 as tested with options).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, direct injection turbocharged petrol, 115 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six speed manual, 2WD.

Performance: 116 mph, 0-62 mph 10.1 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 55.4 mpg, (43mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 117 g/km, VED road tax £160/£140, BiK company car tax 22%.

Insurance Group: 11W.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,234 mm (13.89 ft), W 1,819 mm (5.97 ft), H 1,573 mm (5.16 ft), boot/load space 445 to 1,290 litres (15.72 to 45.56 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.