Latest Volkswagen Golf – First Impressions (plus VW news)

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Updated VW Golf – More Specification – Less Money.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) takes a close look and samples the new versions at their UK press launch…

The seventh generation VW Golf has received a mid-life refresh with more equipment, mildly refreshed styling and updated engines – and on average they cost £650 less than the corresponding outgoing models.

Prices now start, (after the 1 April rise in First Year rate VED road tax costs) from £17,765 for the entry level Golf S 1.0 TSI 85 hp three door hatch up to £34,250 for the 310 hp Golf R

2.0 TSI auto DSG five door hatchback. The 2017 range also consists of five door estates priced from £19,470 for the 1.0 TSI 85 hp rising to £35,300 for the 310 hp R version.

The best selling single version out of the 113 models in the 2017 Golf range is the GTD 2.0 TDI 184 hp turbodiesel, manual gearbox and five door body which is priced from 1 April at £27,880 with demand driven by company car user-chooser customers. Overall the sale of new Golf models in the UK see 65% of registrations go to Fleet and business customers with 35% to retail buyers.

Around 55% of Golf customers in the UK choose a diesel powered model, 83% choose a five door hatchback with three door hatchbacks and five door estates each taking around 8% of sales. The most popular level of specification is SE Nav chosen by 33% of customers.

The Golf, since its launch in 1974, has achieved in excess of over 33 million global sales, more than two million of which have been to UK buyers. A new Golf is produced every 40 seconds from their factories around the world. The VW brand sells in 150 markets and produces vehicles in 14 countries.

The Golf is VW's best selling model range worldwide. The Volkswagen Group of associated brands, including Audi, SEAT, Skoda and Porsche, was the world's largest vehicle producer in 2016 with 10.3 million units, a fraction ahead of Toyota and with Ford in third place.

In the UK in 2016 the VW brand sold 207,028 new passenger cars, a fall of 7.5% due partially to the fallout from the emissions scandal. The Golf remained as the UK's fourth best selling passenger car with 69,492 registrations, a reduction of 5.25% over the sales in 2015 when it was also in fourth place in the UK's top ten new car sales chart.

That's all history now as the 7.5 generation revised Golf models arrive in UK dealerships. VW claim the new models will once again redefine the C-segment by bringing 'big car' technology to its sector.

Now standard across the range are LED rear lights while the majority of models across the Golf hatchback and Estate line-up are also now offered with a new generation of larger and more sophisticated touchscreen infotainment systems.

The new Golf bristles with technical innovations so for the first time in the compact class and depending on model, the new Discover Navigation Pro radio-navigation and online system can be operated via gesture control. Now with a 9.2-inch screen, the system complements the Active Info Display that is also new in the Golf and appears as standard on all Performance Golfs. Meanwhile, the range of online services and apps has also been enlarged.

The latest updated Golfs also create a new benchmark for assistance systems in the compact class, employing technologies that will significantly improve safety. Depending on model,

these include City Emergency Braking with new pedestrian monitoring (Front Assist); a new Traffic Jam Assist that offers semi-automated driving at speeds of up to 37 mph and Emergency Assist which is also new to this segment. Emergency Assist notices if the driver is incapacitated and initiates various measures to rouse them in escalating stages culminating, if the driver remains inactive, in carrying out an emergency stop.

The UK line-up retains a familiar feel, beginning in the hatchback range with S and rising through SE, SE Nav, GT, R-Line, GTE, GTE Advance, e-Golf, GTD and GTD BlueLine to GTI, GTI Performance and the hard-core R.

The estate family offers a wide choice as well with S, SE, SE Nav, GT and GTD and GTD BlueLine models being joined by Alltrack and R.

Engine choices are numerous with 1.0, 1.4 and 2.0 litre TSI turbo petrol engines ranging in power outputs from 85 to 310 hp. There is a new 1.5 TSI Evo unit with Active Cylinder Management joining the line-up in June replacing the current 1.4 TSI unit which only continues in the petrol/electric hybrid five door models. Turbodiesel power units are 1.6 and 2.0 litres with power outputs from 115 to 184 hp. There is also the choice of GTE plug-in hybrid or pure electric (e) power. The revised Golf range arrives in three waves up to June this year with 77% off the range available now.

The styling changes for the revised Golfs are minimal with new headlights, new LED rear lights, new front and rear bumpers, new design of wheels plus new interior trim and a higher level of standard equipment, driver support and safety systems.

At the UK media launch held last week we sampled three versions, the workhorse 1.6 TDI

115 hp five door hatchback, the single best selling variant the GTD 2.0 litre 184 hp five door hatch and the 1.0 litre three cylinder TSI turbo 110 hp petrol unit, but with the five door estate body.

The 1.6 TDI 115 hp turbodiesel unit is probably the cost-effective workhorse engine out of the range. With 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm it is relatively responsive and has a five speed manual gearbox. The engine is quite noisy under load and would be more relaxed at cruising speeds if it had a six speed transmission. Top speed is 123 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 9.8 seconds. As I said this seems to be the workhorse engine of the range. Officially it will return 68.9 mpg but during our test driving using rural and open roads around Bedfordshire the real-life figure was only 47.9 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 106 g/km, the new VED road tax First Year rate is £140 every year; previously it was £0 First Year and then £20 thereafter. Company car drivers will pay 23% Benefit-in-Kind tax; it was 21%. Insurance is Group 14E. The price of this model is now £22,065 after the First Year VED tax increase, previously it was £21,925.

As with all Golfs the handling was surefooted but our five door hatchback test car with the best selling SE Nav specification was fitted with optional 17 inch alloy wheels instead of the standard 16 inch ones. This amplified the thumps and bumps heard and felt through the platform and suspension so I recommend staying with the standard smaller wheels.

Next we moved to the single best selling Golf of all, surprisingly the high performance GTD 2.0 litre TDI 184 hp with a six speed manual gearbox and five door hatchback body. This is the diesel equivalent of the 230 hp petrol powered Golf GTI so it appears those business user-chooser customers who cover high mileage want diesel fuel economy but with more performance. Top speed is 144 mph with zero to 62 mph taking just 7.7 seconds. The Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 61.4 mpg and we achieved 42.9 mpg driving the same test route as the 1.6 TDI. With CO2 emissions of 125 g/km, the new VED First Year road tax cost is now £160 and £140 thereafter; it was £0 and then £110 for Year Two onwards. Benefit-in-Kind tax for company car drivers goes up from 25 to 27% and insurance is Group 28E. This model now costs £27,880 on the road following the First Year VED rate increase.

With its six speed manual gearbox and the considerable amount of 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm the engine accelerates strongly throughout the range, even with

good response accelerating in top gear to overtake slow traffic. With its lowered sports suspension and 18 inch alloy wheels the roadholding and handling is limpet-like with exceptional grip, but the ride is of course firm.

With no 1.4 litre TSI petrol engine models at the media launch to drive (although they are still current but due to be replaced by a new 1.5 litre TSI engine in June), we opted to drive to most relevant engine in the range if you don't want to go the diesel route. It was our 'star' choice especially for retail customers – the 1.0 litre, TSI three cylinder direct injection turbocharged petrol unit in its 110 hp configuration, and for good measure it comes with a six-speed manual gearbox. We could only drive it in estate car form with SE specification and the new on-the-road pricing sees it costing £20,580, but with the best-selling SE Nav spec this adds just £750 to that price. The same engine and gearbox with SE Nav specification with the best-selling five door hatchback body costs £20,260.

Running costs for a petrol engine are low with a Combined Cycle figure for the estate model being 57.6 mpg and 46 mpg on test – not far short of the 1.6 TDI diesel. With CO2 emissions of 112 g/km for the estate and 109 g/km for the five door hatch, VED costs are £160 First Year rate then £140 thereafter. For the best-selling hatchback body style with 109 g/km it's £140 every year. Insurance is rated as Group 13E for both estate and hatch.

This is a lovely, very responsive, very refined engine, fun to drive and it doesn't need to be driven hard to get performance from it, plus it remains flexible to use in commuter traffic. At the moment it is the most commendable engine in the entire 113 model range for most people, hard-core much more expensive performance models excluded. Top speed is 122 mph for both body styles and zero to 62 mph takes 10.4 seconds in the estate and 9.9 seconds in the five door hatchback. Joy of joys it has a slick six-speed manual gearbox and there is a £1,415 seven-speed DSG auto gearbox option as well. Both the estate and hatchback with this engine and spec come with 16 inch wheels as standard – so stay with those and enjoy the ride.

VERDICT

Overall, with the minor styling changes, upgraded interior trim with more specification and the lower purchase prices, the updated Golf is better than ever. But careful consideration needs to be given to which model from the huge and complicated range suits your needs and pockets the best. For now, until we have tried the new 1.5 TSI petrol engine, for me it's the 1.0 TSI 110 hp turbo petrol engine with SE Nav spec, wrapped up in the five door hatchback body and costing £20,260.

For: High performance sports diesel engine, sharp handling, strangely the best-selling single version in the UK, high specification, improved equipment, higher quality interior trim, slightly lower purchase price than before.

Against: Higher new VED road tax costs, sports suspension and larger wheels give a firm ride.

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

VW Golf GTD 2.0 litre TDI 184 hp six speed manual, five door hatchback (best selling model).

Price: £27,880.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbodiesel 184 hp, 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed manual gearbox.

Performance: 144 mph, 0–62 mph 7.5 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined cycle 61.4 mpg (42.9 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 125 g/km, new VED road tax costs £160 First Year rate then £140 standard rate thereafter, BIK company car tax 27%.

Insurance Group: 28E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: 4,268 mm (14.00 ft), W 1,799 mm (5.90 ft), H 1,482 mm (4.86 ft), boot/load space 380 to 1,270 litres 13.42 to 44.85 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.