Latest VW Polo – First Impressions

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Bigger, bolder and better – the new Volkswagen Polo arrives in the UK.

Hotfoot from the car's UK press launch, David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) takes a close look...

The sixth generation VW Polo has arrived in the UK bigger and better than before. Over 14 million Polos have been sold to date throughout five generations, and in 2017 it was the UK's seventh best-selling car with 47,855 registrations. Despite triggering the diesel emissions scandal which contributed to a fall of 17.1% in UK diesel powered car sales, Volkswagen ironically increased their overall new passenger vehicle sales by 0.69% to 208,462 units in a UK car market which saw overall sales fall by 5.65%. Volkswagen is now

the second largest car brand in the UK, overtaking Vauxhall, while Ford remains the market leader.

The new sixth generation Polo is the largest ever, breaking into the four-metre length for the first time. It's now 4,053 mm (13.30 ft) long, it's 1,751 mm (5.74 ft) wide, 1,446 mm (4.74 ft) high and more importantly it has a 94 mm (3.70 mm) longer wheelbase which allows more rear seat legroom as well as a 25% larger boot of 355 litres (12.54 cu.ft). This time around the new Polo is only available as a five door hatchback due to the lack of demand for three door models in the 'supermini' sized sector.



Not only has the Polo's size and specification increased, so have the prices with the outgoing five door Polo models starting at £12,600. The new higher prices, say VW, reflect

the larger size, higher specification and upgraded engines. They now start at £13,855 and run up to £22,640. Currently the specification levels are S, the expected best selling SE, ‘beats, SEL and R-Line, and joining the models later in the year will be the GTI and the higher spec GTI+ version. The popular way of owning any new car is by using a PCP (Personal Contract Purchase) scheme and the new Polo can be yours from £145 a month over a four-year period.

When it comes to engine choices there are revised 1.0 litre, three-cylinder 65 and 75 hp normally-aspirated multi-point petrol units, 1.0 litre TSI turbo direct injection petrol 95 and 115 hp units, and the 2.0 litre TSI turbo petrol 200 hp engine for the GTI variants. The very small numbers of customers wanting a diesel engine have the choice of 1.6 litre TDI 80 and 95 hp units available. The availability of a particular engine depends of the equipment level chosen.

The expected best-selling version will be the 1.0 TSI 95 hp with a five speed manual gearbox with SE specification, priced at £15,930. This model is also available with a seven-speed DSG auto gearbox, at £17,280.

Mike Orford, Head of Press and Public Relations, told the media at the UK press launch this week that 70% of new Polo sales are expected to go to retail customers, more than 95% of customers will choose a petrol-powered model and around 13% of buyers will choose an automatic transmission option.

He added that the Polo is Volkswagen second best-selling model range after the Golf and out of the 14 million sold globally since the first Polo was launched in 1975, 1.4 million have been sold in the UK.

The new Polo uses the Volkswagen Group’s familiar MQB platform in its latest longer and wider configuration, and it has already been used for the new SEAT Ibiza and will be used for the forthcoming new Skoda Fabia and Audi A1. This extended platform will also be used for the T-Cross, SEAT Arona and Skoda Karoq compact SUVs.



Styling wise the new Polo is very much more grown up with bolder and sharper styling lines which will appeal to, amongst others, older customers down-sizing from larger cars, and it has the latest safety systems, infotainment, connectivity and larger car spec to match. But it also adds a new and younger styling for the interior with higher quality finishes and trim, as well as a range of seven brightly coloured personalisation dashboard trim finishes which will appeal to younger owners.

All new Polo models now have LED headlights and all but the GTI variants, which have a larger touchscreen, have an 8.0-inch Composition Infotainment touchscreen system with DAB radio, CD player and Bluetooth as standard. The S variant specification includes 14-inch steel wheels, automatic lights, hill start assist, automatic post collision braking, driver alert functions, multifunction computer, electric front windows, stability control, traction control, remote central locking, VW Connect online services and folding rear seat backs.

The most popular SE level spec includes 15-inch alloy wheels, rear electric windows, electrically heated and adjustable door mirrors, Car-Net App-Connect with Apple CarPlay, Google Android Auto and MirrorLink functions and a variable height boot floor. The ‘beats’ level additions include 16-inch alloy wheels, front fog lights with cornering function, upgraded sound system, front sports seats and various signature ‘beats’ exclusive items of trim. SEL gains chrome exterior trim, LED ambient interior lighting, climate control and automatic wipers. The R-Line level adds items such as LED tinted rear lights, a rear diffuser, sports seats, stainless steel pedals, tinted rear windows and folding door mirrors. The GTI gets bespoke red badging, 17-inch alloys, sports suspension, twin chrome exhaust tailpipes, a sports body kit and electronic locking differential in addition to the 200 hp petrol engine. GTI+ gains automatic LED headlights, keyless entry and push button start, adaptive cruise control and the excellent VW 10.5-inch touchscreen.

So what’s it like to be in and drive? Just like the SEAT Ibiza the first thing you notice is just how much larger this generation Polo looks from the outside and that is confirmed when you get into the five door hatchback. It is a much more mature and grown-up offering, so it’s no longer a good but bland small family hatchback. It has much more kerb appeal with an imposing stance, so that will suit the ‘downsizers’ from larger C-segment family hatchbacks.







Inside it's now more 'premium' class than before, with improved soft-touch trim for the relatively high dashboard below a steeply raked windscreen. Whilst there are more areas of textured interior trim which are higher quality, some of the plastics used for the interior door cards and the console between the front seats feel and look brittle and of not of the same high quality as used higher up in the cabin. The controls are familiar to other Volkswagen models and well positioned but I'm not convinced the new touch buttons around the touchscreen are user-friendly.

Much more impressive are the larger interior dimensions which I previously enjoyed with the new SEAT Ibiza. There is more width and in the rear definitely more legroom, making it a more practical family car. Another significant improvement is with the ride quality. The suspension provides a flat and stable ride which is very compliant and comfortable, with the suspension ironing out all but the worst of impacts from potholes. In addition the road noise

intrusion on the SE version I tried was low, as was wind noise. With a longer wheelbase and wider front and rear tracks the overall handling is well-balanced, but it's perhaps not as agile as the latest Ford Fiesta. But that said the new Polo has really grown up to be a far more accomplished, practical and likeable vehicle than the past generation models.



The best-selling engine will be the 1.0 litre, three-cylinder turbocharged direct injection petrol unit with 95 hp, and although that doesn't sound a lot of power, in reality it is ample whether it's scooting around town traffic or cruising on the open road. It's the 175 Nm (129 lb.ft) of torque that makes this high revving engine responsive but the torque only starts to deliver from 2,000 rpm so the engine needs to be kept in its sweet spot powerband for acceleration and overtaking. The five speed gearbox has well spaced ratios but it would be better with a six-speed unit to reduce engine rpm at higher cruising speeds. For many users the seven-speed auto transmission would be a nicer option but that costs more to buy of

course.

Top speed with this engine is an ample 116 mph, with the zero to 62 mph acceleration time taking 10.8 seconds. Officially in the Combined Cycle this engine will return 64.2 mpg but on our brief test drive around the winding and busy country rounds in Bedfordshire the figure was 42.3 mpg, but I would expect more in open road driving conditions. The CO2 emissions are a low 101 g/km so VED road tax is £140 each year. Insurance costs should be attractive as well, with a Group 8E rating for the 95 hp SE spec model we tested. The standard warranty cover is an ungenerous three years/60,000 miles, not that competitive with many other manufacturers now offering anywhere between four and seven years cover, some with unlimited mileage.

Bearing in mind the Polo can be an ideal car for younger drivers or those on a tighter budget, the 1.0 litre 65 hp normally-aspirated petrol engine with SE specification is £1,300 less to buy than the turbo 95 hp model; it's priced at £14,630 and also has the lowest 1E insurance group rating. Officially this model will return 60.1 mpg in the Combined Cycle and on our test drive using the same roads as the more powerful turbocharged 95 hp petrol engine, it returned a much better figure of 47.6 mpg. Definitely food for thought if outright performance isn't important. Top speed is still 102 mph and zero to 62 mph takes a long 15.5 seconds but it felt faster than that. With CO2 emissions of 108 g/km, VED road tax is still the same £140 a year.

VERDICT

Whichever model is chosen the overall competence of the new Polo, with its larger interior space, improved specification and sharper exterior styling, outweigh the price increases and the odd niggle about some areas of trim quality and modest warranty.

For: Roomiest Polo yet, higher specification, colourful trim options, comfortable ride, dynamic exterior styling, low running costs, a very grown up and mature family-sized hatchback.

Against: Increased prices, some areas of poorer quality interior trim, six-speed manual gearbox not standard fit, no three-door model, ungenerous warranty.



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

New Volkswagen Polo SE 1.0 TSI 95 hp, five speed manual. Price: £15,930. (Best selling model).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, turbocharged direct injection petrol, 95 hp 175 Nm (129 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, five speed manual.

Performance: 116 mph, 0–62 mph 10.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 64.2 mpg (42.3 mpg on my brief test drive).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 101 g/km, VED £140, BiK company car tax 19%.

Insurance Group: 8E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,053 mm (13.30 ft), W 1,751 mm (5.74 ft), H 1,461 mm (4.74 ft), wheelbase 2,548 mm (8.36 ft), boot/load space 355 to 1,125 litres (12.54 to 39.73 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.