New model of car, new roof bars? That’s expensive, but it doesn’t have to be that way…

Published: July 24, 2017

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Online version:

https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/new-model-of-car-new-roof-bars-thats-expensive-but-it-doesnt-have-to-be-that-way/

If you change your car, does that necessarily mean that you have to buy a complete set of new roof bars for it, and do away with the perfectly good ones that you already have?

Gerald Morgan investigates – and saves a very useful sum of money in the process...

Ever bought a car, then got a set of roof bars and maybe even a roof rack to fit the bars as well? What happens to these when you buy another car, or even a newer version? Usually the roof bars will not fit on the new car, meaning there is a set of redundant bits to sell, or collect dust in the garage.

Having owned a 2005 VW Polo from 2006, I bought a set of Thule lockable roof bars for it. The set contains the bars themselves, feet, and a fitting kit, which is basically a set of

‘claws’ for the feet that grab the roof when fitted. Very modular, with a ‘mix and match’ approach by Thule that allows their equipment to fit various makes and models of cars.

I recently replaced the 2005 Polo with a 2014 Polo, and was disappointed to find that the previous bars did not fit the new car, and all of the bits I had were obsolete, so it appeared that I needed to buy another complete set that would cost around £210. In addition, whilst it was possible to buy the bars and feet from local suppliers, the fitting kit had to be sent away for, as it is VW Polo specific, and not many are sold (apparently).

Then a thought occurred – what would I need to get now for the 2005 Polo, in order to have a set of roof bars that work? As the old set is obsolete, the Thule website came up with a list of parts, all with different pack numbers from the old version. However, looking at the contents of the fitting kit, they still had the same ‘claws’ as the old set. Hmmm, maybe I just needed to buy the fitting kit and see if it allows the old bars and feet fit the new car….

The fitting kit cost £39 on a ‘click and collect’ basis, and arrived in store the next working day (3 days working days actually quoted). There were two ‘claws’ and handed rubber pads for the front bar, plus two identical ‘claws’ and pads for the back bar. The instructions gave settings for the adjustable feet that correspond to marks on the bar. These are slightly different from the original settings, so after fitting the new rubber pads on the correct ‘claw’, clicking the new ‘claws’ into the feet, and setting the correct foot positions, I was ready to try out the theory.

If it did not work, nothing would be lost as I would buy new feet, or at worst, new feet and bars. After washing the roof to mount the bars I then, with help, mounted the front bar – it fitted!! Same again with the rear bar, which also fitted!

Above: The foot with the ‘claw’ ready to be fitted…

Above: The foot with the claw fitted…

Although I probably will not be able to fit the current Thule roof accessories to the bars, I am happy to save £170, and not have even more roof bits hanging around. The bars are only fitted when needed – mainly to carry timber for my main hobby – but that's another story.