Latest Skoda Octavia vRS First Impressions, and Skoda News

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Hot Skoda Sales and a New, Hotter Top Of The Range vRS.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency)

Skoda's UK new car sales for the first quarter of this year are up by 6.4% to 27,039 units, ahead of the overall market growth. This is better news as last year their UK sales dipped slightly due to the run out of old models, like their Roomster compact MPV, and introduction of new models like the highly rated large Superb Hatch and Estate.

Despite the CO2 emissions scandal that hit their parent company Volkswagen Group, globally Skoda had a very good year in 2015 with over one million car sales, an all time

record for the Czech brand. The original company was founded 121 years ago, first as a bicycle manufacture, then motorcycles and car production started in 1905, and then the Skoda name appeared. Eventually the company became a member of Volkswagen Group 25 years ago in 1991, and that enabled the brand to quickly expand their range from just one to seven model types.

Already this year Skoda's global new cars sales have reached 276,600 units and their best selling model is the Octavia mid-sized C-segment five door Hatchbacks and Estates, including their high performance vRS versions. Just short of 110,000 Octavias were sold globally last year and 22,616 of those were in the UK – where it is also Skoda's best selling line-up. The UK is also the World's number one market for Octavia vRS sales and these versions account for 24% of all Octavia UK registrations.

Currently the Skoda range consists of the Citigo city car, Fabia supermini, Rapid Hatch and Spaceback, Octavia Hatch and Estates, Octavia vRS – which because of its popularity Skoda classes as a separate range, Yeti 2WD/4WD Crossover and the large Superb Hatch and Estate models. With no totally new model ranges due this year Skoda UK is keeping the customers happy with various added-value derivatives for the Citigo and Fabia models, a Sportline trim and equipment level for the Superb range and a Dynamic Chassis Control option for Octavia versions – including the vRS models.

But in the Spring of next year their most important model arrives, the Kodiaq, a mid-sized C-segment SUV with 2WD/4WD versions, petrol and diesel engine choices and five or seven seat options. Given the global growth of SUVs, this Skoda newcomer cannot come too soon. No prices are available but are expected to start from around £20k.

Supporting the growing demand for Skoda models are 129 UK dealers and 26 authorised repair centres. Following a 145% rise in demand last year from UK fleet and business user-chooser customers, Skoda's UK retail/fleet new car sales split is 50/50.

Introduced in 2013 the third generation Octavia range is the backbone of the Skoda range.

The sales success is because of the wide range of variants on offer, based around five door Hatchbacks and Estates. There is the choice of petrol and diesel engines, manual and auto gearboxes, 2WD/4WD system, Scout versions and of course the flagship vRS sports variants which are available in both body styles. Over 205,000 new Octavias have found UK homes since the model's introduction in 1998.

With the comprehensive range of engine choices, plus the two core body styles and numerous specification levels, Octavia prices are wide-ranging, starting at £16,515 and rising to £29,410. The Octavia competes in the C-segment lower medium family car sector against the likes of the VW Golf, Ford Focus, Audi A3 Sportback and new Vauxhall Astra. But in reality, due to its design, it offers more interior and load space, almost up to D-segment vehicles. That better than average space, being user-friendly and keen prices has reaped in lots of Media awards for the Octavia.

Latest Octavia vRS

The icing on the Octavia cake is the high performance vRS versions. They account for 24% of all Octavia UK sales and the UK is the largest global market for these high performance versions. The vRS specification is available in Hatch and Estate body styles with 2.0 litre TSI 220 hp or 230 hp turbo petrol engines and a 2.0 litre TDI 184 hp turbodiesel unit. All engines have manual or DSG auto gearbox options and the diesel unit with auto transmission can be had with 4×4 traction. The pricing of vRS versions starts at £24,460 and goes up to £28,810. Available for ordering in June for September deliveries will be an £850 option of a Dynamic Chassis Control system which adjusts the damper settings between Sport and Comfort modes.

The standard vRS specification includes 18-inch alloy wheels, LED daytime running lights, LED rear lights, sports suspension, vRS sports bumpers, rear spoiler, vRS upholstery, multi-function sports steering wheel, upgraded infotainment system, sat-nav and touchscreen, cruise control, lane assist, driving mode selection and rain sensing wipers. The new 2.0 litre TFI vRS 230 hp turbo petrol version, in Hatch or Estate bodystyles, has additions which include 19-inch black alloys, black door mirror housings and black front grille, black gloss

exhaust tailpipes with a sports soundtrack, black vRS badging front and rear, electro-mechanical front locking differential, front and rear parking sensors, electrically adjustable driver's seat, heated front seats and vRS sports seats with leather upholstery.



Out of the total vRS sales in the UK, retail customers account for 55% of registrations.

My test Octavia version – the vRS 230 hp six-speed manual five door Hatch, costs £26,580 but if even more space is needed then the fast 230 hp Estate version costs £27,800.

Whilst the performance figures will impress – 155 mph with zero to 62 mph taking just 6.7

seconds, and with a Combined Cycle figure of 45.4 mpg (39.5 mpg on a brief test) – it is the interior space and high quality cabin that means more – when most of the time the vRS will be used as a fast family car. The rear seat legroom is really impressive in its size-sector. There is a 590 litre (20.84 cu.ft) boot for the Hatch and 610 litres (21.54 cu.ft) for the Estate. Fold down the rear seats and this goes up to 1,580 (55.79 cu.ft) and 1,740 litres (61.34 cu.ft) respectively.

Talking about figures, other than space, the new 230 hp version I tried costs £2,120 more than the 220 hp variant. For your money you get marginally faster performance, the new electro-mechanical locking differential, sportier subtle styling and an even higher equipment level. Styling wise it is not overstated and driving wise it's good but again not a revelation. It is not a track-orientated car but when conditions allow it can a very fast, well balanced open-road car – and importantly very passive in heavy stop-start traffic.

The new differential works well driving out of tight corners with the power delivered smoothly without torque steer or wheel spin – although understeer is still evident. The 230 hp turbocharged direct injection petrol engine feels strong right through most of its rpm range with 350 Nm (258.1 lb.ft) of torque delivered from just 1,500rpm. The drive mode selector goes from Eco to Normal to Sport to Individual settings, so the performance can be easily matched to the road or traffic conditions.



On my brief test drive around the busy roads of Buckinghamshire the test drive returned 39.5 mpg with a mix of Eco and Sport modes selected. The ride is on the firm side but not uncomfortably so, but the future option of the Dynamic Chassis Control system will be a worthwhile bonus. The steering was well-weighted and the six-speed gearbox had well spaced ratios to suit the engine's powerband.

VERDICT

Whilst the Octavia five door family Hatch version with the vRS 230hp treatment might not be the 'hottest' of 'hot' hatchbacks, it is 'handy' and combines practicality of space, high spec levels and boosted performance. All these elements add up to a well-priced, good all-round package, which can be used on a daily basis without fuss.

For: Added performance, higher specification, very roomy, good quality cabin, well priced against other makes of family hot hatchbacks.

Against: Unsettled low speed ride.

MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Skoda Octavia vRS 230 5-door Hatchback.

Engine: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbocharged direct injection TSI petrol.

Transmission: Six speed manual, front wheel drive via a sports differential.

Power: 230 hp.

Torque: 350 Nm (258.1 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62mph: 6.7 seconds.

Top speed: 155 mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 45.4 mpg (39.5 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 142 g/km, VED road tax £145 each year, BIK company car tax 25%.

Insurance Group: 30E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,686 mm (15.37 ft), W 1,814 mm (5.95 ft), H 1,449 mm (4.75 ft), boot/load space 590–1,580 litres (20.84–55.79 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats.

Price: £26,580.

