# SEAT Alhambra 2.0 TDi – Road Test

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SEAT'S ALHAMBRA LARGE MPV – FIT FOR PURPOSE.

Assessed by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

One of the intriguing recent surveys, this one done by Auto Trader the 'bible' for used and

new UK car sales trends and figures, showed that the two fastest selling used cars were both MPVs. The top selling model was the SEAT Alhambra followed by the Volkswagen Sharan, both interestingly diesel automatic versions. In fact in Auto Trader's top ten fastest selling used car sales chart, six of the models were diesel automatic models and nine models overall were also automatics.

So in the real world of practical motoring requirements are we losing our must-have desire for an SUV or Crossover type of vehicle? New car sales suggest not but in the UK's used car market this recent survey has found that the fastest selling used cars are roomier and more practical MPV people carriers.

Is demand being driven by the UK's better summer weather, fuelling the growth in staycation holidays? No doubt helped by the political chaos and uncertainties caused by Brexit and the chaos with travel through airports and tour operators going bust. So perhaps the reality is in these uncertain times we just need more practical carrying space for our travel requirements.

This demand for used MPVs prompted me to take a look at the SEAT Alhambra, not a used one, but the latest current one but with its new 2.0 litre 177 hp TDI turbodiesel engine and with its standard fit automatic gearbox. Remember auto gearboxes are a popular choice by used car customers.



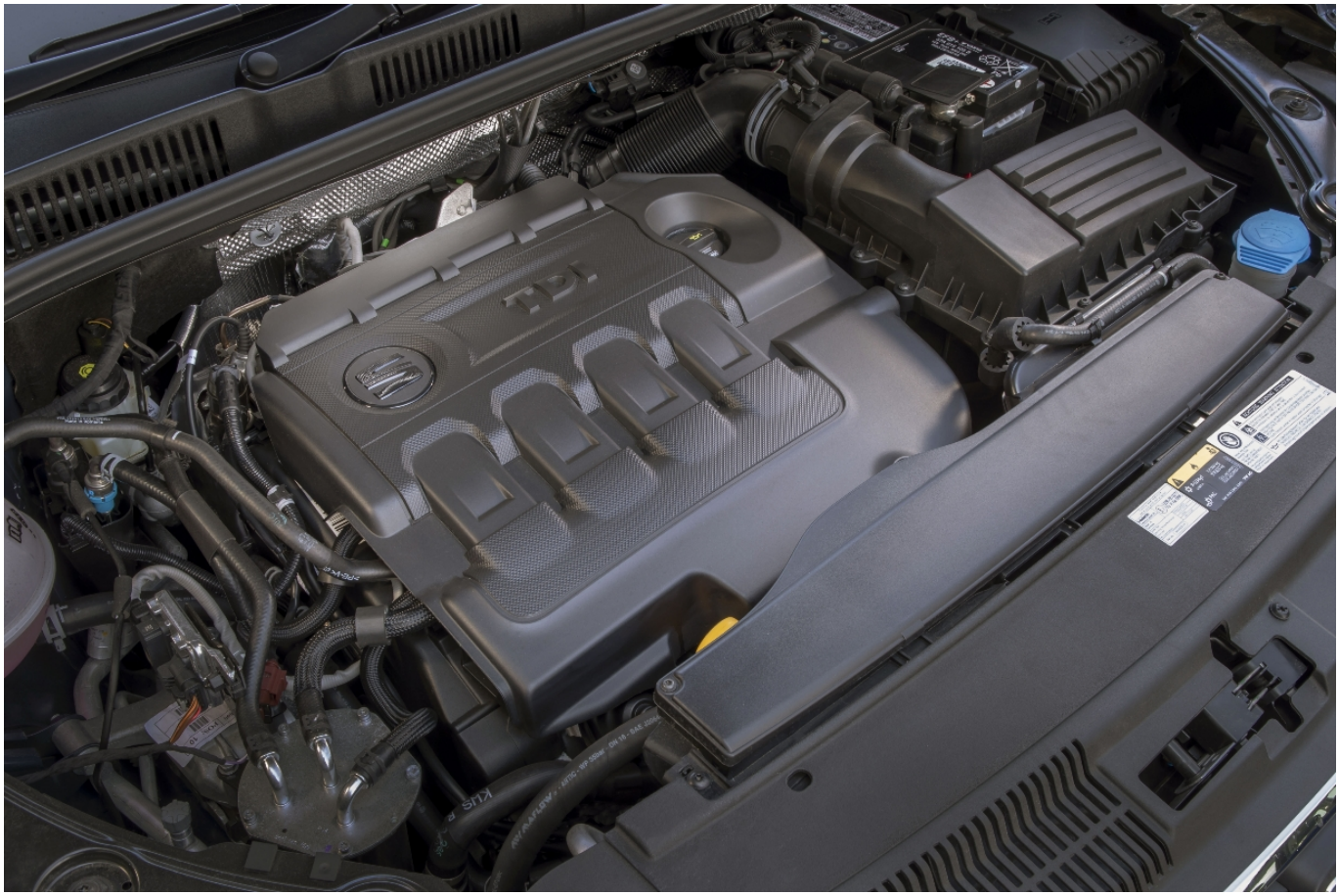
The fact that a ‘used’ Alhambra is in such demand is because not many large MPVs are sold new these days. So when a used one becomes available it gets snapped up by eager buyers who have found out that even large SUVs don’t measure up when it comes to our practical needs. I have seen so many SUVs on our UK roads this summer with large luggage boxes fitted to the roofs providing extra load carrying capacity, and just as many SUVs with numerous bicycles strung onto racks hanging precariously from vehicle tailgates. Hence the real need for something just a bit more practical and safer.

The SEAT Alhambra isn’t alone in the large multi-seat MPV market, it competes against its similar VW Sharan stablemate, Ford Galaxy, Ford S-Max, Citroën Grand C4 SpaceTourer and a new generation of angular partly commercial vehicle based models such as the

Citroën SpaceTourer, Peugeot Rifter and Vauxhall Combo Life to name just the most popular – but there are more.

The SEAT Alhambra range is relatively simple with three engine options; a 1.4 litre TSI 150 hp turbo petrol with a manual six speed gearbox, a 2.0 litre TDI 150 hp turbodiesel with six speed manual and DSG auto transmission options, and the new 2.0 litre TDI 177 hp with its standard fit six speed DSG auto transmission. Depending on the engine chosen there are three trim and equipment levels – SE, SE L and Xcellence. Prices range from £30,660 to £38,515.

My test model was the new 2.0 litre TDI 177 hp with the top of the range Xcellence specification carrying the top price of the range. Now this engine and specification might be a grade higher than most families and fleet users might want, the 2.0 litre TDI SE L manual priced at £34,780 looks to be the best selling version, but for high mileage business users and in particular business chauffeuring companies my test model would seem ideal.




No matter what specification or engine is chosen all Alhambra models have seven individual seats in a practical angular body design with sliding rear side passenger doors and a full height tailgate. The seats can be folded individually to configure the interior for the most suitable passenger and load carrying combinations. With all seven seats in use there are just 300 litres (10.59 cu.ft) of load space, with the rear row of two seats folded this goes up to 658 litres (23.24 cu.ft) under the luggage cover but up to 1,167 litres (41.21 cu.ft) if loaded to the roof. With the middle row of three seats folded and the rear row also folded down, the maximum capacity goes up to a huge 2,297 litres (81.12 cu.ft).



The load area length measured from the tailgate to the rear of the two front seats is 2,100 mm (6.89 ft) but for the more basic SE spec level the front passenger seat can also be folded flat to accommodate objects up to 2,950 mm (9.68 ft) long which should please active sporty types with their paddleboards, surfboards and those cycles, all better inside a vehicle than out. For even more practicality the new 177 hp Alhambra has a maximum braked towing weight of 2,400 kg (5,291 lb) so it will be capable of towing a large caravan or boat as well when required.



As for exterior dimensions the Alhambra is 4,854 mm (15.93 ft) long, 1,904 mm (6.25 ft) wide, 1,720 mm (5.64 ft) high, and with a long wheelbase of 2,919 mm (9.58 ft). As the floor is free of any transmission tunnel, being front wheel drive, there is no shortage of foot space or legroom in the second row of three individual seats. So whether is used as a family bus, carrying of cycles and other long sports equipment, business executives or those people who transport their canine friends on holiday or to dog shows, the Alhambra measures up for a wide range of uses by a wide range of users.

Now although it might not have the fashionable street-cred or kerb appeal of the now commonplace SUVs, it’s not a bad looking vehicle with its aerodynamic front end and swept back windscreen leading to a practical angular shaped bodyshell. Furthermore, joy-of-joys having sliding rear side passenger doors means that getting in and out of the middle and

third rows of seats is much easier in today's cramped side-by-side stingy parking spaces. Visibility is good throughout from front to rear with its low waistline and high roof providing large windows, and of course the parking sensors and (where fitted) rear view camera helps as well. Keeping the interior tidy there are numerous user-friendly storage areas and drinks holders.

Even the SE spec level is no 'budget-box' model and just some of the spec includes 17-inch alloy wheels, dark tinted rear windows, cruise control, auto lights/wipers, electrically adjustable, heated and folding door mirrors, sat-nav with a 6.5-inch touchscreen, radio, Bluetooth, a USB cable provides Apple and Android compatibility, folding tables on the front seat backrests, electric front and rear windows, air-con, comfort suspension, electronic parking brake, three-zone air-con, blind-spot detection and lane assist, stability control, front assist with autonomous braking, driver tiredness recognition, traffic sign recognition, a full set of front side and curtain airbags and ISOFIX child seat fixing points for the second row of seats.

Briefly the SE L level additions include DAB radio, electrically adjustable front sports seats, leather upholstery, heated headlight washers, rear view camera, power operated side sliding doors and powered tailgate. The top spec Xcellence additions include electrically operated panoramic glass sunroof, upgraded trim inserts, KESSY keyless entry with push-button start, and sports suspension.

The front interior fascia and parts of the door trim are covered with soft-touch vinyl textured finishes with printed carbon-fibre trim inserts so they look clean and durable. Centre of the dashboard is a relatively small old-style touchscreen which these days is more functional than fashionable but it does the job – just. Thankfully there are separate heating, temperature and ventilation controls plus heated seats, heated rear window and front screen and door mirror buttons. All the controls, switches and general layout are typical of those used in most of the newest Volkswagen Group of brands, not the touchscreen though, so functionality is good rather than class-leading.

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At the heart of my Alhambra test car was the new 2.0 litre, TDI 177 hp four cylinder turbodiesel engine. This is one of a number of new or revised power units recently, and still, being introduced to Volkswagen Group brand models to comply with the EU6D Temp emission regulations and new WLTP fuel consumption system. This engine produces a very healthy 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm which noticeably gives it more low-down acceleration response than the 150 hp TDI engine. It also copes more easily by working less hard to maintain high cruising speeds when carrying a full load. Matched with the slick six speed DSG twin-clutch auto gearbox, which is standard for the 177 hp TDI Xcellence model, power delivery was prompt and smooth, making driving easy at all speeds especially stop-start travel. It was noisier than expected, especially under acceleration, but that might be down to the vehicle's bulkhead sound-proofing rather than the engine itself.

Top speed is 130 mph so the legal 70 mph cruising speed places absolutely no stress on the engine at all and the 9.3 seconds acceleration time from zero to 62 mph easily keeps up with other fast moving traffic. The extra grunt proved especially useful climbing steep hills when loaded, again in keeping with other passenger vehicle traffic.

Despite its sports suspension the Xcellence model still retained a compliant ride, it just stiffens the suspension to reduce body-roll during cornering given the sportier performance – so it felt safe, secure and most of all predictable, all the must-haves for a family wagon.

The official WLTP Combined Cycle fuel consumption figures are 38.7 to 40.4 mpg and during my week of driving using all types of roads and driving conditions it returned 39.8 mpg, well within the official parameters. The CO2 emissions are 147 g/km which means the diesel rate First Year VED road tax cost is £530 followed by the £145 Standard rate. Company car drivers get stung for 37% Benefit-in-Kind tax because of the added 4% penalty for being a diesel. Insurance is a competitive Group 22E, only two Groups higher than the petrol models and one Group more than the 150 hp TDI diesel versions. The warranty for all is the usual ungenerous VW Group three years/60,000 miles.



## VERDICT

New or used the SEAT Alhambra large seven-seater MPV is certainly fit for purpose and very much in demand if space and practicality are the sensible requirements rather than now too common and less practical family size SUVs.

For: Spacious, versatile seating and load carrying combinations, comfortable, strong new engine, well priced in its class with high equipment levels, relatively low cost insurance.

Against: Its large size means it can be tricky finding suitable parking spaces, dated sat-nav and infotainment/connectivity functions, ungenerous warranty.




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

## SEAT Alhambra Xcellence 2.0 TDI 177 hp, six speed DSG auto large seven seat MPV.

Price: £38,515.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder EU6D Temp compliant turbodiesel, 177 hp, 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm, six speed DSG automatic, front wheel drive. Performance: 130 mph, 0–62 mph 9.3 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 38.7 to 40.4 mpg (39.8 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 147 g/km, diesel rate First Year VED road tax £530 then £145 Standard rate, BiK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 22E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,854 mm (15.93 ft), W 1,904 mm (6.25 ft), H 1,720 mm (5.64 ft), wheelbase 2,919 mm (9.58 ft), boot/load space 300 to 2,297 litres (10.59 to 81.12 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,400 kg (5,291 ft), five doors/seven individual seats.