# SEAT Arona compact SUV – First Impressions

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SEAT Arona Compact S

## Another week, another SUV, says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency), who gives his first impressions of this latest SEAT model.

Another week arrives and yet another new range of SUV models is released into our new car market already overflowing with choices.

This time it’s the SEAT Arona compact five door SUV, which is largely based on SEAT’s recently introduced Ibiza supermini sized hatchback range. They both share the VW Group’s A0 version of their highly rated MQB platform.

Priced from £16,555 to £24,235, the range of 24 models the Arona is faced with competition from an array of other model ranges including the Nissan Juke, Peugeot 2008, Renault Captur, Audi Q2, Citroen C3 Aircross, Ford EcoSport, Vauxhall Mokka/Crossland X, Kia Stonic, Hyundai Kona, Suzuki Vitara/S-Cross, Mini countryman and MG ZS.

The Arona's core specification levels are SE, SE Technology, FR, FR Sport, Xcellence, and Xcellence Lux. There are also First Edition versions of the SE Technology and Xcellence. Depending on the spec level chosen there is a choice of three TSI petrol engines and two 1.6 TDI turbodiesels. The petrol units are 1.0 litre, three cylinder 95 and 115 hp and the new VW Group 1.5 TSI EVO 150 hp unit with cylinder deactivation. The diesels are 95 and 115 hp units. Although classed as an SUV there is no four wheel drive or Grip Control option, they are all front wheel drive models. Depending on the engine chosen there are five and six speed manual gearboxes and a DSG automatic option for the 115 hp petrol and 95 hp diesel engines.

At the media launch this week Hywel Evans, SEAT's UK product manager for Arona said, the expected best selling version will be the 1.0 litre 115 hp manual with FR specification priced at £19,895. Petrol-powered models are expected to be the choice of 70% of UK customers, 75% will choose a manual gearbox and 60% of sales will go to retail buyers. As a guide to sales numbers the Arona is expected to match their best-selling new Ibiza range.

He added that the compact SUV sector in the UK has grown four-fold since 2015 with 271,000 sales last year, and predictions are for 301,000 registrations in the sector this year.

On the subject of sales numbers, like all VW Group brands, SEAT no longer give out such information although the VW Group of brands have just reported a record year for global sales of 10.74 million new vehicles, an increase of 4.3% over 2017. In the UK SEAT sold an all-time record 56,130 new cars last year, an 18.3% increase over 2016 in an overall new car market down by 5.65%. They claim to be the fastest growing mainstream brand in the UK and Europe as a whole.

The Arona, 100% designed and built in Barcelona by SEAT they say, takes its name from a municipality in Tenerife, following SEAT's tradition of naming their models after places in Spain. The Arona is 4,138 mm (13.58 ft) long, 1,780 mm (5.84 ft) wide and 1,543 mm (5.06 ft) high, with seating for four adults or the rear can best accommodate three children and there is reasonable rear seat legroom thanks to the long in this class 2,566 mm (8.42 ft) wheelbase. Like the new Ibiza five door hatchbacks and the new VW Polo which share the new platform, the interior space in the rear cabin is most noticeable and is most welcome for family use. However unlike the Citroën C3 Aircross compact SUV, unfortunately the rear seats do not slide fore and aft to maximise leg space or enlarge the 400 litre (14.13 cu.ft) boot but the rear seat backs do fold to increase this space to 1,280 litres (45.20 cu.ft).

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Exterior styling wise the Arona is a taller version of the new Ibiza five door hatch, a mixture of sharp styling lines, sculptured panels, the latest familiar application of the SEAT family face at the front, the rising waistline at the side, and to promote its SUV credentials it has protective mouldings along the sills and over the wheelarches. At the rear is a conventional tailgate slightly canted forwards and roof spoiler to give an aerodynamic look to the side profile.

The front interior layout of controls, switches and the central touchscreen are common features from other new generation Volkswagen models and the detailing depends upon the spec level chosen. As a brief guide the starter SE level spec items include 17-inch alloy wheels, a bi-coloured roof, LED daytime running lights and tail-lights, front assist distance warning, emergency braking, cruise control, hill descent control and tiredness recognition, 5.0-inch colour touchscreen, air-con, adjustable double height boot floor, auto lights and remote central locking. The SE Technology additions include rear parking sensors, Connectivity Pack Plus with its media system and eight inch touchscreen, sat-nav, MirrorLink, Apple CarPlay and Google Android Auto, wireless phone charger and CD player. The likely best-selling FR level adds 17-inch alloy wheels, sports suspension, FR design bumpers and front grille, sports front seats and detailed FR trim, SEAT Drive Profile with

Normal, Sport, Eco and Individual settings to tune the throttle and steering responses, rain sensing wipers, alarm and roof rails. FR Sport adds 18-inch wheels, Dynamic Chassis Control and Alcantara upholstery. Xcellence changes include 17-inch alloy wheels, keyless entry, blind spot detection, rear cross traffic alert and adaptive cruise control. The Xcellence Lux adds 18-inch alloys, front parking sensors, rear view camera and the SEAT Drive Profile from the FR equipment level. The bi-colour and metallic bodywork paint choices are standard and not extra cost options, to simplify the choices.

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So it looks smart, the interior is similar to the Ibiza hatchback with a mix of soft and hard plastic trim materials and the controls and infotainment system are all well known from other VW Group new models. It is a well put together package and above all it will appeal to families because it offers more rear space for passengers. The driving position is good, there is ample visibility thanks to its raised ride height and well proportioned windows.

Add in the well-known capabilities of the MQB A0 platform and we have a sharp-handling and nimble vehicle but it is just one of many new such compact SUV vehicles available so it’s a competitive and large market sector. It will be the price and the convenience of a good SEAT dealership that will be important deciding factors as to whether a customer chooses the Arona or any one of a number of alternative similar models available.

At the media launch, based in Cambridge and taking in a test driving route covering the crowded streets of the university city and the flatlands of Suffolk and Norfolk, we tried the best selling 1.0 litre, TSI three cylinder, turbo petrol 115 hp petrol engine with its six speed manual gearbox. Unfortunately this engine with the best selling FR specification, priced at £19,895, wasn’t available but it was with the FR Sport level which includes larger 18-inch wheels – not a choice I would recommend. This model is priced at £20,665. These larger wheels combined with the FR sports suspension are ok for main road travel but around potholed town roads and poor country roads they unsettled the ride comfort and provided choppy handling. My preference would definitely be for standard 17-inch wheels with the

FR spec which will be softer-riding and with more controlled handling, and it's £770 cheaper than the FR Sport.

The TSI turbo engine we know well from the various VW Group models and with the Arona it is combined with a six-speed gearbox, or for an extra £1,080 you can choose the DSG twin-clutch automatic transmission. Given that the Arona is a family vehicle, even a compact one, the power provided by the 115 hp unit does give that extra bit of performance when the vehicle is loaded. With 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, matched with the six speed gearbox it performs well across the wide-ranging requirements for smooth travel in and around towns, spritely performance when required on open roads, and also it's still refined for motorway cruising speeds. It does require quite a lot of gearchanges on winding country roads to keep it in its power output sweet-spot, but there is enough torque to allow block gearchanges, third to fifth or fourth to sixth to ease the number of those changes. Top speed is 113 mph, zero to 62 mph takes 9.8 seconds, the Combined Cycle figure is 56.5 mpg. However we didn't get close to that during our test driving, even at leisurely speeds, with a figure of 43.9 mpg and much of that was done in Eco mode.

The CO2 emissions are 114g/km so VED road tax is £160 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate. Benefit in Kind company car tax is 21% and insurance is Group 12E. Currently The Arona has a PCP finance offer of a £1,000 deposit contribution by SEAT and payments over 48 months start from £219 per month.

## VERDICT

Overall the SEAT Arona is a smart and roomy new addition to a highly competitive and popular compact SUV market. It's good to look at, well-equipped, it's roomy, most models are well priced but-so are many of its competitors. Good though it is, maybe I'm not convinced it's a 'showstopper' and is going to become the benchmark range by which others are judged in this sector.

For: Good exterior looks, roomy interior, well-equipped, good safety equipment, easy to drive.

Against: Some cheap-feeling interior plastic trim, 115 hp petrol engine only available on higher spec models, very firm and choppy ride with 18-inch wheels with FR Sport spec, real-life fuel economy didn't get close to the official figure, ungenerous warranty.




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

## SEAT Arona 1.0 TSI 115 hp, manual, FR Sport, five door compact SUV.

Price: £20,665 (best-selling model – same engine with FR spec costs £19,895).

Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder, direct injection turbocharged petrol, 115 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six-speed manual 2WD.

Performance: 113 mph, 0–62 mph 9.8 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 56.5 mpg (43.9 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 114 g/km, VED £160/£140, BiK company car tax 21%. Insurance Group: 12E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,138 mm (13.58 ft), W 1,780 mm (5.84 ft), H 1,543 mm (5.06 ft), wheelbase 2,566 mm (8.42 ft), boot/load space 400 to 1,280 litres (14.13 to 45.20 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,200 kg (2.646 lb), five doors/five seats.