SEAT Ateca Road Test

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Keith Ward test drives SEAT Leon-based Ateca SUV

Drivers in Europe reportedly experience a puncture every 75,000 miles on average. Well, it happened to me recently and turned out to be a happier experience than it might have been.

Lucky break number one: It was nothing as dramatic as a night-time blowout at motorway speed. I was only made aware by a tyre pressure drop warning symbol on the dash (how many cars have that?) while sauntering in morning winter sunshine on a country road in Welsh border country.

Not my own car. It was one of the increasing number of models without a spare wheel, or even a “skinny” emergency spare, in favour of a sealant injector, not much use, I was subsequently advised, in this case.

Lucky break number two: Ever-so-helpful locals. The first country garage workshop I pulled into gave prompt attention, located a protruding screw, but apologised they weren't equipped to deal with tyres the size of the broad 18-inch Bridgestones on the 4WD SEAT Ateca SUV I was driving.

They confirmed it was a slow puncture, pumped in some air to keep me going and phoned ahead – all, they insisted, without charge – to make an appointment at a tyre specialist they knew in the next sizeable market town. There, a plug repair was prescribed and efficiently executed in 30 minutes. The bill – a reasonable £12. Take a bow, the Llanfihangel Garage and the Station Works Garage at Llanfyllin.

Introduced to the UK last autumn, the Ateca has enjoyed a good reception. Based on the Leon and with family VW Group echoes of the Tiguan, it is SEAT's first SUV, so a relatively late starter in Europe's fastest-growing market segment. It pluckily takes on such pace-setters as the Nissan Qashqai and Kia Sportage.

A 12-strong Ateca range, priced competitively from £18,000 to just under £30,000, offers a choice of two petrol engines (115 or 150 PS) and three diesel (115, 150 or 190 PS). Most are front drive through six-speed manual transmission but a couple of diesel-only 4WD versions with a DSG 7-speed automatic option top the range. They do not aspire to real off-road versatility, but add snow and mud settings to the selectable drive programmes.

There are five levels of trim. Standard kit includes that tyre pressure warning, air-con, all-electric windows and mirrors, hill hold, leather steering wheel and gear knob, five-inch monochrome media touchscreen (colour and up to eight inches in upper versions), Bluetooth audio streaming, USB and SD card connectivity, LED daytime running lights and city emergency braking – the Ateca scores highly on safety.



Navigation with 3D map display, DAB radio and flashy bi-colour alloys come in at around £22,000 upwards. Top XCELLENCE trim includes sports seats in black leather and a real show-off feature: Click the door key and the side mirrors beam to the ground an Ateca logo as a puddle light.

The Ateca looks good and purposeful in that high-stance SUV manner. Leg and headroom are generous in this class, although the piggy-in-the-middle rear passenger has to straddle a floor tunnel. The rear seats do not slide. The cabin is comfortable, storage thoughtful and instruments clear.

The boot is wide and unextended is on par with rivals but not as versatile as some – the dividable rear setbacks merely flop forward at an angle onto the fixed cushions, to allow

long loads up to 1,400 mm or about 55 inches, according to our tape.



On the road we tried two versions. Particularly impressive was the 1.4 litre, 150 PS XCELLENCE turbocharged petrol – smooth, quiet and agile, it made the upright SUV Ateca feel more like a hatch in its confident, unfussy handling. It's surely among the most enjoyable SUVs to drive.

It was hung with a variety of extras (including an 18-inch space-saver spare wheel !) as well as an all-round camera system, 10-speaker audio, panoramic sunroof and startling Samoa Orange styling highlights around its metallic Nevada white frame, helping to boost the price from just under £24,000 to a hefty £28,720.

That brought it close to the (punctured) 4WD 2.0 litre 150 PS diesel Ateca we drove, its own fewer options boosting its price from a showroom £27,425 to £29,155. It has its own virtues, but on paper it is and feels heavier than the petrol, is marginally not as quick and is noticeably noisier. The 4WD kit reduces the size of the boot from 510 to 485 litres (18.01 to 17.12 cu.ft), and its higher CO2 rating carries a greater business tax liability.

But we recorded a tad under 50 mpg in the diesel, against 43.2 in the petrol, which proved incidentally to have a temperamental filler flap. It is supposed to respond to finger pressure, but – in North Yorkshire this time – refused for me as well as the station attendant and another sympathetic customer at the next pump. It had to be gently prised open. Next day, it worked perfectly.

VERDICT

Despite puncture and petrol filling problems, the Ateca proved impressively enjoyable.



*On the way from SEAT: A smaller, Ibiza-based SUV this year to take on the Nissan Juke – and eventually a seven-seater SUV, seen so far as a concept.

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

SEAT Ateca XCELLENCE 1.4 Eco TSI 150 PS SUV five door; five seats.

Engine and transmission: Petrol; 1,395 cc; four cylinder; turbo; six speed manual

gearbox; stop-start. Front wheel drive.

Power and torque: 150 PS @ 5,000-6,000 rpm; max torque 184 lb.ft (249 Nm) @ 1,500–3,500 rpm.

Dimensions and weight:

Length 4,363 mm (14.31 ft); width 1,841 mm (14.31 ft); height 1,615 mm (5.30 ft); kerb weight 1,359 kg.

Luggage compartment: Length 850 to 1,400 mm (2.79 to 4.59 ft); min width 1,010 mm (3.31 ft); vol 510 to 1,604 litres (18.01 to 56.64 cu.ft).

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.5 secs.

Top speed: 125 mph.

Fuel consumption: On test 43.2; official Combined 52.3; tank 50 litres (11 gallons).

Emissions and taxation: CO2, 123 g/km; Road Tax – Band D – nil for first year, then £110 per year; Benefit-in-Kind tax liability 21%.

Insurance Group: 14E.

Warranty: 36 months/60,000 miles; 12 years body; 2 years Europe-wide breakdown.

Tyres: 215/50; R18.

Price: £23,905; as tested, with options £28,720.

Rivals: VW Tiguan, Nissan Qashqai, BMW X1, Mazda CX-5, Honda CR-V, Kia Sportage

SEAT Ateca XCELLENCE 2.0 TDI 4Drive – variations from above 1.4 petrol:

Engine and transmission: Diesel; 1,968 cc; four cylinder; six speed manual gearbox; 4WD.

Power and torque: 150 PS @ 3,500–4,000 rpm; max torque 251lb ft (340 Nm) @ 1,750–3,000 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 9.0 secs.

Top speed: 122 mph.

Fuel consumption: On test 49.7 mpg; official Combined 55.4 mpg; tank 55 litres (12.10 gallons).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 129 g/km; VED Band D – First year nil, then £110; Benefit-in-Kind tax liability 25%.

Dimensions and weight:

Height 1,625 mm (5.33 ft) – with roof rails; kerb weight 1,548 kg (3,413 lb).

Boot Vol. 485 litres (17.13 cu.ft).

Tyres: 225/50; R18.

Price: £27,425 ; as tested £29,155.