



Seat Exeo Sport Tech

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by Kim Henson



Sleek, understated contemporary styling comes as standard with the Exeo. The competitively priced 2.0 TDi Multitronic version shown here provides impressive performance and excellent fuel economy.

It is now over a quarter of a century since the Spanish manufacturer Seat introduced its first Ibiza model to British buyers, and during that time the company has gone from strength to strength...

In the UK the firm has just enjoyed its best ever month for sales, achieving a market share



of 1.98 per cent, and its dealership network is growing. It has also just been announced that this year Seat has become the top-selling make in Spain.

The firm sees all its models as design-driven and dynamic, and therefore appealing to 'young-spirited' people.

Two years ago the Exeo was launched, and represented Seat's first ever entry into the highly competitive 'B' segment of the car market, where the newcomer was pitched against well-liked models such as the Ford Mondeo and Vauxhall Insignia.

Seat's stated aim with the new vehicle was to offer premium quality and excellent value for money. British buyers have evidently agreed with this approach, and now the Exeo is the third best-selling model in the company's line-up. The car is based on an Audi platform, but with suspension system enhancements to provide a more supple ride quality, yet at the same time still giving sporty handling.

MULTITRONIC

An important newcomer in the Exeo range is the Multitronic model, powered by a 143PS variant of the Volkswagen Audi Group's proven turbo diesel engine, driving through an automatic transmission system (120PS and 170PS versions of the Exeo are also available, but these are not offered with the Multitronic transmission).

In recent years diesel-powered automatic cars have become increasingly popular for their combination of excellent fuel consumption AND ease of driving. In the case of the Exeo, a constantly variable transmission (CVT) is employed. By contrast with a conventional automatic gearbox, the CVT system is inherently more efficient, so fuel consumption and emissions are minimised.

In this Seat, the Multitronic system deliberately incorporates artificial 'steps' so that the engine note alters as the ratios are changed, giving greater feedback to the driver than some traditional CVT systems.



When operated in 'D' ('Drive') mode, the transmission can be used so that the car behaves like a normal automatic, changing gear by itself according to road and traffic conditions. In addition, there is a 'Sport' setting. When the central gearchange lever is flicked into the 'S' position, and the driver accelerates, the car hangs onto each ratio for a longer period, improving performance by making the most of the available power.

In addition, the lever can be moved towards the left from its normal 'Drive' position, so that ratios can then be engaged sequentially - by moving the lever forward to change up a gear, and back to change down. Alternatively, two steering wheel mounted paddles can be employed to change gear manually; these are set up so that the slightest touch on the paddle (left paddle for downward changes; right paddle to change up) will engage the next required ratio. There is no need for large movements of the paddles to be made.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

I drove the Sport Tech version of the Exeo Multitronic, which is available in saloon and estate ('ST') versions, and was impressed by its willing, torquey performance. I also liked the ease with which the CVT transmission could be operated. When using the car in the conventional 'Drive' mode, or with the 'Sport' setting engaged, the gearchanges were particularly smooth and virtually imperceptible (apart from the obvious change in engine note).

I also found that manual operation of the gear selector (especially by the steering wheel mounted paddles) was very slick and rapid; driving the car manually was fun and the car felt eager to perform.

Although by its nature this Exeo is very much a 'driver's car', there's plenty room for all the family (including good head room and reasonable leg room for rear seat occupants), and the luggage compartment is cavernous.

The seats proved to be comfortable (I tried the rear seats too), and I found the ride quality to be pleasantly supple, yet when driving through a series of bends the Seat felt very



composed and body roll was minimal.

Mechanical refinement on the example I drove was excellent, and when cruising at speed the cabin was hushed. This is helped by an acoustic windscreen (apparently reducing noise from outside the car by five decibels), also by high overall gearing; at 70 mph in top (7th) ratio, the engine is turning at just 1,900 rpm.

Fuel consumption is excellent for a spacious family car that delivers such impressive performance. The official 'Combined' figure is 48.7 miles per gallon, and in real-life motoring, on long runs the car should be capable of returning between 55 and 60 mpg.

FEATURE-PACKED

This Exeo is brimming with standard-fit safety, convenience and comfort features, and of particular note are the DVD/SD card-based satellite navigation system (which permits data to be stored on an SD card as well as a DVD), and the upgraded sound system.

The Bose 10 speaker system provides clear, rich tones for speech and music. However, it also incorporates another very clever feature, which works effectively to minimise the 'normal' sounds of the vehicle by producing wave forms to counteract the noises produced by the engine, tyres, wind, etc.

So if (for example) you are listening to a piece of music in which a loud section changes to a quieter passage, there is no need to turn up the volume. Instead, the built-in system just described 'filters out' vehicle noise so that the music can be enjoyed in the manner originally intended by the composer/performer.



The two litre four cylinder turbo diesel engine develops 143PS; it's a refined and willing unit.



Smart, easy-to clean five spoke sports wheels were fitted to the Sport Tech variant we drove.

VERDICT

Competent, well-equipped, great to drive and with a particularly likeable transmission system, the Exeo Multitronic makes an excellent alternative to other players in its market segment. With genuinely sporty performance, commendable fuel consumption and a



'bargain' price tag (bearing in mind the very comprehensive specification) of approximately £24,000, this Seat is worthy of very serious consideration.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF

Exeo Sport Tech 2.0 TDI CR 143PS Multitronic

Engine: 1968cc overhead camshaft four cylinder turbocharged diesel

Power: 143PS @ 4,200 rpm

Torque: 320 Nm @ 1,750 to 2,500 rpm

0-62 mph: 9.3 sec

Top speed: 129 mph

Fuel consumption:

Urban: 37.2 mpg

Extra Urba: 58.9 mpg

'Combined': 48.7 mpg

CO2 emissions: 153 g/km

'ON THE ROAD' PRICE: £24,215.