Skoda Octavia 1.5 petrol estate – Road Test

Published: September 18, 2020

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/skoda-octavia-1-5-petrol-estate-road-test/



DRIVEN SKODA'S NEW OCTAVIA ESTATE BUT THIS TIME WITH PETROL POWER…

…says David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The all-new Skoda Octavia range of Hatch and Estate models are well and truly in circulation after the initial COVID-19 lockdown delays, and are making their way to eager UK customers with more versions just announced.

The Octavia has been Skoda's best selling global model range with 400,000 of them rolling

off the production lines each year. They are built in the Czech Republic, China, Russia and India.

This fourth generation range in the UK up to now has only been available with recently introduced 1.0 litre TSI 110 hp engine with a manual gearbox joining the 1.5 litre 150 hp TSI petrol manual gearbox unit plus the 2.0 litre turbodiesel 116 hp manual and 150 hp DSG auto engines and transmissions and we were promised more power units to come.

First news of these additional engines came to light a few days ago with Skoda announcing 1.4 TSI iV 204 hp and vRS iV 245hp plug-in hybrids which will arrive early next year and e-Tec 48-V mild hybrid 1.0 litre 110 hp and 1.5 litre, 150 hp TSI petrol-electric powertrains becoming available before year end. In addition the sporty vRS iV models will offer front or four wheel drive variants and there will be the option of a DSG auto gearbox. More news just in regarding the 1.0 TSI e-Tec mHEV mild hybrid 48-V power unit with a belt-driven starter-generator, a DSG auto gearbox as standard, it is available with the Hatch body from £23,005 and as an Estate from £23,985. No UK prices for any other of the new power units are available as yet.

Other Octavia models are priced from £20,965 up to £28,460 for the Hatch and £21,945 to £29,540 for the Estate with initially the choice of SE First Edition, SE L and SE L First Edition spec levels plus SE First Edition and SE Technology for the new e-Tec models.



Skoda's Octavia line-up…

As the delivery to the UK of the new Octavia models was delayed by the lockdown, when vehicles did arrive some of us motoring media types were lucky to get very prompt initial test drives. Unfortunately some of them clashed so my colleague ended up with a 150 hp diesel Estate just as I was taking delivery of a 150 hp diesel Hatch. Still the information and driving experiences were worthwhile judging by the feedback from our readers.

Now I'm getting to grips with the new Octavia Estate with the 1.5 litre TSI 150 hp petrol engine but still with SE L First Edition specification, priced at £26,230. Whilst diesel versions will still be the mainstay choice for high mileage fleet customers the petrol units will appeal to retail buyers, especially this 1.5 litre TSI four cylinder unit with cylinder deactivation. This generation of Hatch and Estate models are larger, have improved specification, better driving safety support features and important connectivity functions,

and the prices are at least still competitive if now not a great deal less than the competition.





The new Octavia still sits between the C and D sized passenger car sectors competing against the likes of the VW Golf, Ford Focus, SEAT Leon, Toyota Corolla, Skoda Scala, Audi A3 and BMW 1 Series but also against larger D segment models such as Skoda's own Superb, Audi A4, BMW 3 Series and the VW Passat, so it crosses size boundaries and pricing structures. Of course the Octavia Estate in particular also has to compete against family sized fashionable SUVs such as the new Ford Kuga, VW Tiguan, Skoda's own excellent Kodiaq, SEAT's Tarraco, Volvo XC40 and the Nissan Qashqai, just to name a very small proportion of what similar sized models you can buy.

One of the Octavia's strong selling points over many years, apart from price and value for money specification, has been its size. The new Estate is 22 mm (0.87 in) longer than before at 4,689 mm (15.38 ft). The width has also increased by 15 mm (0.59 in) to 1,829 mm (6.00 ft) and there is a long wheelbase of 2,686 mm (8.81 ft) which provides best in class legroom for rear seat passengers both adults and children. The Octavia Hatch and Estate models use an evolution of the VW Group MQB platform which provides the facility for a longer wheelbase and more bodywork overhang at the rear for a larger boot/load area.

The Estate's boot capacity, which is the largest in the segment, has increased by 30 litres (1.06 cu.ft) to 640 litres (22.60 cu.ft) with the rear three seats in use and a massive 1,700 litres (60.03 cu.ft) with the rear seats folded down. By comparison the Hatch has a capacity of 600 litres (21.19 cu.ft) – 10 litres (0.35 cu.ft) more than the previous model, increasing to 1,555 litres (54.91 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down.



The Skoda Octavia might be new but it has all the styling hallmarks of the previous

generation, another case of evolution over revolution following Skoda's philosophy of being 'Simply Clever', it's not broke – don't fix it in other words.

There is a revised front end with new grille, bumper and razor-sharp narrower headlights featuring LED technology for low beam, high beam and daytime running lights as standard. The tail lights, brake lights and fog lights make use of LED technology as well. The new

design roof rails emphasise the elongated silhouette of the Octavia Estate. In between the front and rear ends of Hatch and Estate versions are sharp continuous styling lines and sculptured panels which emphasise the Octavia's length as well as enhancing its kerb appeal, giving it classy up-market status.

Inside there is a new multi-level dashboard arrangement with the 10.25-inch touchscreen mounted centre and high up on the virtual cockpit dashboard. Below that is a line of buttons to control various functions including the driving mode selector, Park Assist and a short-cut to the air con settings. The smart looking new two-spoke steering wheel, which can be heated as an option, has new control buttons and knurled scroll wheels, allowing drivers to operate a total of 14 different functions without removing their hands from the steering wheel to operate the touchscreen some of the time.

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However it's not the most rapid or user friendly touchscreen system, it takes time to load and doesn't retain the driver's settings such as Eco mode or to turn off the intrusive Lane Keep Assist function, these have to be reset each time the car is started. Another issue was the sat-nav system distance readout was in kilometres not miles despite the fact that the miles setting was chosen in the set-up memory and miles and mph were displayed in the virtual cockpit instrument display. It appears Skoda UK is waiting for a software 'fix' to rectify this issue.

Otherwise the interior was a nice environment with a combination of chrome trim inserts, chrome door handles, a neat centre console plus soft-touch trim materials. The LED ambient

lighting multi-colour combination functions operate for the front doors, footwells and dashboard and give the new Octavia a premium look and feel in keeping with its inevitable move upmarket. As I've already stated there's lots of interior space and legroom and the only negative comment from two adult rear seat passengers was the lack of padding for the rear seat squabs so impacts from road imperfections were transmitted to their derrieres.

I'm not going to trawl through the huge list of spec items or vast list of extra cost options. Suffice to say the SE L First Edition includes the latest connectivity and driving safety and support systems functions, 17-inch alloy wheels and overall the equipment level is high, but most of it can also be found on other VW Group brand's models.

My test Octavia SE L First Edition Estate with the 1.5 TSI 150 hp turbo petrol engine and six speed manual gearbox is priced at £26,230, but it had the £595 metallic paint option, £1,150 panoramic sunroof, £345 Park Assist and a £180 steel spare wheel so the whole package cost £28,500. Given its size, spaciousness, quality, styling inside and out and driving performance I think proves the new Octavia remains a fair bargain and in these uncertain times that makes Skoda's Simply Clever marketing theme very appropriate.

In operation the Octavia Estate is an easy car to live with. It's relatively nimble and agile with predictable steering and cornering control even when heavily loaded. The 1.5 litre, four cylinder TSI petrol engine has cylinder deactivation and it changes from four to two-cylinder mode operation under light power demand, during its coasting mode or during the overrun. The switch between two and four cylinders is seamless.



Its 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm can be marginal for response under load. In those circumstances it needs full use to be made of the gearbox to keep it at its responsive best in its optimum torque band. If this engine becomes available with a DSG auto gearbox go for that option – it would making driving just that little bit more agreeable.

I was thinking during my relatively long driving period with the test car that this big estate with this petrol engine would benefit from having hybrid assist to boost the torque output and improve the 'grunt' needed at times. And by the time I sat down to write this review Skoda have announced that we will get e-Tec 48-V hybrid technology for this engine, so good news.

However the 1.5 litre test car unit was impressively fuel efficient during my 10 days of driving, much of it having a family motoring break in a very congested Norfolk and Suffolk. The 200 miles, mainly motorway/dual carriageway journey, there from our Cotswold home at around 70 mph returned an excellent 59 mpg, and 58 mpg on the way home, much of it done in Eco mode once cruising speed had been reached. Adding in another 250 miles of rural and traffic congested roads motoring the overall figure was 54.7 mpg, far exceeding the official WLTP Combined Cycle 42.2 to 49.6 mpg figures.

The big estate is not slow either with the zero to 62 mph acceleration time of 8.3 seconds, and it has a top speed of 139 mph. The CO2 emissions are 130 g/km so VED road tax is £175 First Year rate then £150 Standard rate and company car drivers will pay 29% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is group 19E and warranty – the usual VW Group's rather ungenerous three years/60,000 miles.

VERDICT

From front to back, in the car, under the bonnet and even for those of us with deep pockets, the new Skoda Octavia Estate or Hatch has to be a sensible purchasing option in a very competitive market sector.

For: Size, space, brilliant real-life fuel economy in its class, high spec, generally comfortable ride, eye-catching kerb appeal, still retains its good value considering its size and spec.

Against: Stingy warranty, some touchscreen and other control function are not user-friendly, sat-nav km/miles selection glitch, rear seats lack comfy squabs.



Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Specs. In Brief:

Skoda Octavia SE L First Edition Estate, 1.5 TSI 150 hp, manual.

Price: £26,230 (£28,500 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, four cylinder TSI turbo petrol with cylinder deactivation, 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm, six speed manual.

Performance: 139 mph, 0 – 62 mph 8.3-seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle 42.2 – 49.6 mpg (54.7 mpg on test over 700 miles of mixed motoring conditions).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 130 g/km, VED £175/£150, BiK company car tax 29%. Insurance Group: 19E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,689 mm (15.38 ft), W 1,829 mm (6.00 ft), H 1,468 mm (4.82 ft), wheelbase 2,686 mm (8.81 ft), boot/load space 640 to 1,700 litres (22.60 to 60.03 cu.ft), braked towing weight 1,500 kg (3,307 lb), five doors/five seats.