Skoda Scala Monte Carlo – Road Test

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SKODA'S SCALA FAMILY HATCHBACK GAINS SPORTY MONTE CARLO SPECIFICATION.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The five door family sized C-segment Scala hatchback was launched towards the end of last year but it's only now the range-topping Monte Carlo sports spec level is introduced.

The Scala was effectively a replacement for Skoda's underwhelming Rapid range and sits

between the Czech brand's Fabia supermini sized hatchback and estate models and the highly rated Octavia C/D-segment hatchback/estate models. Good news, a new, even roomier and much anticipated by me Octavia range is about to arrive in the UK. I make no bones about it with my 'sensible' hat on I like Octavia models, right size, right price, right engine/transmission options but the new roomy Scala gives it a run for its money for those customers on a tighter budget.

The new Scala has a lot going for it and it's a very good option to competitor models such as the new VW Golf, new SEAT Leon and new Audi A3 Sportback all of which use the same components as the Scala. The sector benchmark competitor is as always the hard to beat Ford Focus.

Before I get onto the subject of the Monte Carlo spec its worth outlining just how the Scala differs from other Volkswagen Group competitor models whilst using the same core components. Skoda calls this alternative use 'Simply Clever' for their advertising strapline.

As an example of being Simply Clever I draw your attention to its construction. The new Scala is the first Skoda model to be based on Volkswagen Group's advanced MQB-A0 platform. This variable platform allows a wealth of different vehicles to be produced in a very flexible, efficient and cost effective manner. In addition to the Golf, A3 and Leon their spin-off SUV variants also use the same modular platform.

For all cars built based on this platform the position of engines and the distance from the middle of the front wheels to the pedals remain the same. This allows for uniformity in the front end layout of the engine, transmission and drivetrain plus plenty of space in the interior's front section.

In contrast other dimensions such as wheelbases, track widths, wheel sizes and seat positions are variable. Steering and chassis components as well as the latest engines and transmissions can all be combined in a modular way to use this platform.

Modern designs and the use of high-strength steels significantly reduce the weight. The

large number of models built based on the MQB platform make it possible to offer innovative assistance and safety systems such as Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) or proactive occupant protection systems in models of all sizes.



But being ‘Simply Clever’ Skoda has extensively modified the MQB A0 platform further for the Scala by choosing the longest possible wheelbase and rear overhang. The result is a typical Skoda, more space for your money. This is predominantly thanks to the long wheelbase of 2,649 mm (8.69 ft) within the Scala’s total length of 4,362 mm (14.31 ft), while width and height are 1,793 mm (5.88 ft) and 1,471 mm (4.83 ft) respectively. The luggage capacity is 467 litres (16.49 cu.ft) with the three rear seats in place and up to 1,410 litres

(49.79 cu.ft) with the rear seat backs folded down, although they don't fold completely flat into the floor. This is by far the largest load capacity in the mid-sized C-segment family hatchback market.



Depending on the spec level the Scala is available with four turbocharged direct-injection engine options – all of which meet the latest Euro 6d-TEMP emissions standards. Petrol engine options are a 1.0 TSI three cylinder unit with 95 hp or 115 hp and a four cylinder 1.5 TSI unit with 150 hp. The single diesel offering is a four cylinder 1.6 TDI unit that develops 115 hp. All three petrol engines are equipped with a petrol particulate filter. The 1.6 TDI is fitted with a diesel particulate filter.

In terms of transmissions, the entry-level 1.0 TSI 95 hp is equipped with a five-speed manual gearbox only. The 1.0 TSI 115 hp, 1.5 TSI 150 hp and 1.6 TDI 115 hp are all fitted with a six-speed manual gearbox as standard but have the option of a seven-speed DSG automatic unit.

But it's not all about size, the Scala's original three spec levels are S, SE and SE L but now the top of the range Monte Carlo level has been added and is available only with the 115 hp and 150 hp TSI petrol engines with manual and auto gearbox choices.



Prices for the overall Scala line start £16,945 and range up to £25,395 with Monte Carlo spec prices ranging from £22,685 to £25,395. My test Monte Carlo model was the 1.5 TSI 150 hp manual priced at £24,125. An auto gearbox would add £1,270 to that price. My test version has an insurance group rating of 19E and Benefit-in-Kind company car tax is rated at 29% due to its WLTP rated CO2 emissions of 133 to 152 g/km. The WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy is 47.9 to 42.2 mpg. The First Year VED road tax costs £215 followed by £150 Standard rate. On my week of test driving journeys the overall average was 47.2 mpg which for a turbo petrol engine in a family hatchback of the Scala's size and its performance of 137 mph and zero to 62 mph of 8.2 seconds was exceptionally good.

The new higher spec level takes its name from Skoda's rallying success although the Monte

Carlo branding is more to do with higher equipment and trim levels than performance. But externally it does look good with its 18-inch black alloy wheels, black radiator and under bumper front grilles, the extended rear roofline spoiler and what could be described as a slim diffuser at the rear. This model also gains full LED front and rear lights plus front fog lights with cornering function. The sports styling cues sit well with the Scala's design proportions especially the long wheelbase.



I'm less happy about the £425 extra charge for front and rear parking sensors. Likewise a rear view camera will cost you an extra £305 and given the rear visibility is not brilliant it should be standard fit on this top of the range model. I'm starting to notice that Skoda like so many other brands is now charging for items that were previously included as standard.

Value for money was always a major buying point for potential Skoda customers.

Inside the Monte Carlo spec includes a panoramic sunroof, the Virtual Cockpit system we know from other VW Group brands and also the flat bottomed sports steering wheel. There is an Amundsen sat-nav system with its centrally positioned floating 9.2-inch touchscreen, the usual SmartLink connectivity functions, bespoke sports style front seats with red and black Microsuede upholstery, DAB radio, air con, adaptive cruise control, lane assist, space saver spare wheel and of course Skoda's signature umbrella stored in the door.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Whilst the interior space in its class is exceptional and the Monte Carlo specification desirable, some of the plastic trim looks more budget-buy than upmarket, although there are good amounts of soft-touch finishes.

Ride comfort was really good even allowing for the fitment of 18-inch sports alloy wheels. The handling balance of the car felt predictable and composed with plenty of cornering grip and good overall traction on very wet road surfaces. The 1.5 litre TSI engine with its 150 hp is certainly the go-to engine for the Scala. With 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from 1,500 rpm the engine felt generally responsive as long as I kept to the gear-change point automatic prompts which were a little intrusive. With its six forwards gears this turned the gearbox into effectively what is a close ratio unit allowing the torque to provide the grunt immediately when needed. Falling below the optimum rev level and the engine response suffered calling for a lower ratio to be selected to build back momentum again. Sixth gear high speed cruising was effortless and really very quiet. For slow in-town driving speeds and stop-start conditions the unit wasn't as comfortable, requiring constant changes between first, second and third gears to optimise the torque output. I rather suspect the seven speed DSG auto gearbox would be a better partner for this engine.

VERDICT

Overall the Skoda Scala Monte Carlo, like other versions in the range, has more plus points

than negative ones and no matter what version you chose you will enjoy the very roomy interior space this family hatchback provides.

For: Class leading spacious interior with excellent rear seat leg room, large boot, reasonable level of specification, sports interior styling, mild sports exterior styling tweaks, refined engine, good real life fuel economy.

Against: Still some cheap-feel plastic trim despite its top of the range new high spec level, rear view camera at this price should be standard fit, plenty of gearchanging needed to keep the engine in its optimum torque output band, usual ungenerous VW Group warranty.



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

Skoda Scala Monte Carlo 1.5 TSI 150 hp manual five door hatchback.

Price: £24,125.

Engine/transmission: 1.5 litre, four cylinder turbo petrol engine 150 hp, 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque, six speed manual.

Performance: 137 mph, 0–62 mph 8.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: WLTP Combined Cycle fuel economy 47.9 to 42.2 mpg (47.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 133 to 152 g/km VED First Year road tax £215 then Standard rate £150, BiK company car tax 29%.

Insurance Group: 19E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,362 mm (14.31 ft), W 1,793 mm (5.88 ft), H 1,471 mm (4.83 ft), wheelbase 2,649 mm (8.69 ft), boot/load space 467 to 1,410 litres (16.49 to 49.79 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.