Volkswagen Polo (sixth generation) – Road Test

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FIT FOR MODERN DAY PURPOSE – THE LATEST VW POLO…

…Trying it out for size has been Robin Roberts (and Motoring Milestones).

Whether you're working from home, reducing mileage or simply downsizing to save money, today's Volkswagen Polo clearly demonstrates city cars do not have to lack the refinements

of much larger models.

For 46 years, the VW Polo has been seen as the city car with status. While some drivers opted for cheaper competitors from rivals, the Polo-person was perceived as a more mature driver who appreciated sound engineering and valued a stronger resale price.

However, the early Polos did not have all the luxuries and equipment of some cheaper rivals so seemed an expensive buy in comparison. However, a few years ago that started to change as VW began filtering down their larger cars' technologies and equipment.

Today's 6th generation Polo is a very refined city car with a compelling list of standard equipment and an options list which meet the needs of drivers both old and young.

Our Active test model sits just below the middle of the range and had the mid-range output of the triple-cylinder engines, while the only extra was Reef Blue metallic paint finish at £585.

The three-cylinder 95 PS engine was an immediate starter and idled particularly quietly considering its natural imbalance and once the throttle was depressed it picked up in note and produced a pleasant busy whizz.

That continued until it headed towards peak power point between 2,000 and 3,500 rpm when it was developing 175 Nm (129 lb.ft) and above that it became less pleasant and more intrusive.

The 95 PS engine was matched with a direct and slick changing five-speed manual gearbox and I found myself frequently changing as the ratios were not ideal. The acceleration was good, not quick, up to the legal maximum when used solo but with a couple of passengers aboard or a loaded boot that ability to respond was blunted.

The clutch action was light and the footbrake had a good level of assistance blended with application so you could stop very gently or abruptly. The throttle was similarly light underfoot.

I really liked the weightier feel to the steering and it turned well in tight spaces without being twitchy on open roads. The front struts and rear beam suspension is simple and effective soaking up bumps and behaving on country roads, never giving a moment's concern although the tendency was to run wide on tighter turns.

Suspension? You could say it was slightly firm, not hard, and it let you know how well it was coping as road rumbles were the most consistent source of noise.

The Polo's secondary controls were compactly laid out on the wheel and column for the most part, operated easily and a console carried the remainder for the dual zone air conditioning, windows and front seats' heaters.

It had a lot of intelligent safety and security features to monitor surroundings and maximise braking ability to prevent accidents or mitigate effects, and it also included some comfort, convenience or assistance elements usually found on more expensive models.

The climate controls worked really well on the hottest days and were backed up by powered windows all-round, controls were very light and the system quickly responded to temperature and distribution changes.

Oddments room was reasonable not generous for a family car, and the useful boot with its low level floor quickly tripled in capacity as the seats progressively dropped flat. A full-size spare wheel was a welcome sight under the floor.

Visibility was excellent all round aided by good wipers and lights, a quick to clear windscreen demister and backed up by sensors – but not a reversing camera.

VERDICT

On the road the VW Polo Active 95 was easily capable of keeping up with traffic on main roads if the gearbox was used and it settled down to a good motorway gait.

What did surprise us was the fuel economy with an official Combined Cycle WLTP figure of 49.6 mpg which contrasted with our actual figure of 59 mpg overall during our week of motoring.

Sometimes, it’s the little things in life that deliver the biggest surprises.

For: Nimble, very economical, easy to drive, well made, quiet, sophisticated safety and infotainment systems.

Against: Just adequate performance diminishes with heavier load carrying and hard acceleration, only five gears, functional trim and firm seats/ ride, ungenerous warranty.

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

Volkswagen Polo Active

Price: £18,945

Mechanical: 95 PS 3-cylinder 1.0 litre petrol, 5-speed manual

Performance: 116 mph, 0 – 62 mph 10.8 seconds, CO2 121 g/km, 59 mpg on test

Insurance Group: 8E

Taxation rates: BiK company car tax rating 28%, VED First Year road tax £180, £155 Standard rate

Warranty: 3-years/60,000 miles

Dimensions and capacities: L 4.06 m (13.32 ft), W 1.97 m (6.46 ft), H 1.47 m (4.82 ft), boot space 351 to 1,125 litres (12.40 to 39.73 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats