Volkswagen T-Cross – First Impressions

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Author: David Miles

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NEW VW T-CROSS URBAN SUV – 'I AM MORE' CLAIM THE MARKETERS'.

David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) takes a first close look at this newcomer.

With SUV styled vehicles now taking close to, or in some countries, over 40% of the new car market, manufacturers from budget to luxury brands have wasted no time in covering all angles in terms of size, performance and price.

Another new SUV range is now joining the fray, the Volkswagen T-Cross, an urban SUV which sits below in size and price their popular T-Roc which in turn sits below the Tiguan, Tiguan Allspace and Touareg SUVs in the brand's comprehensive SUV line-up.

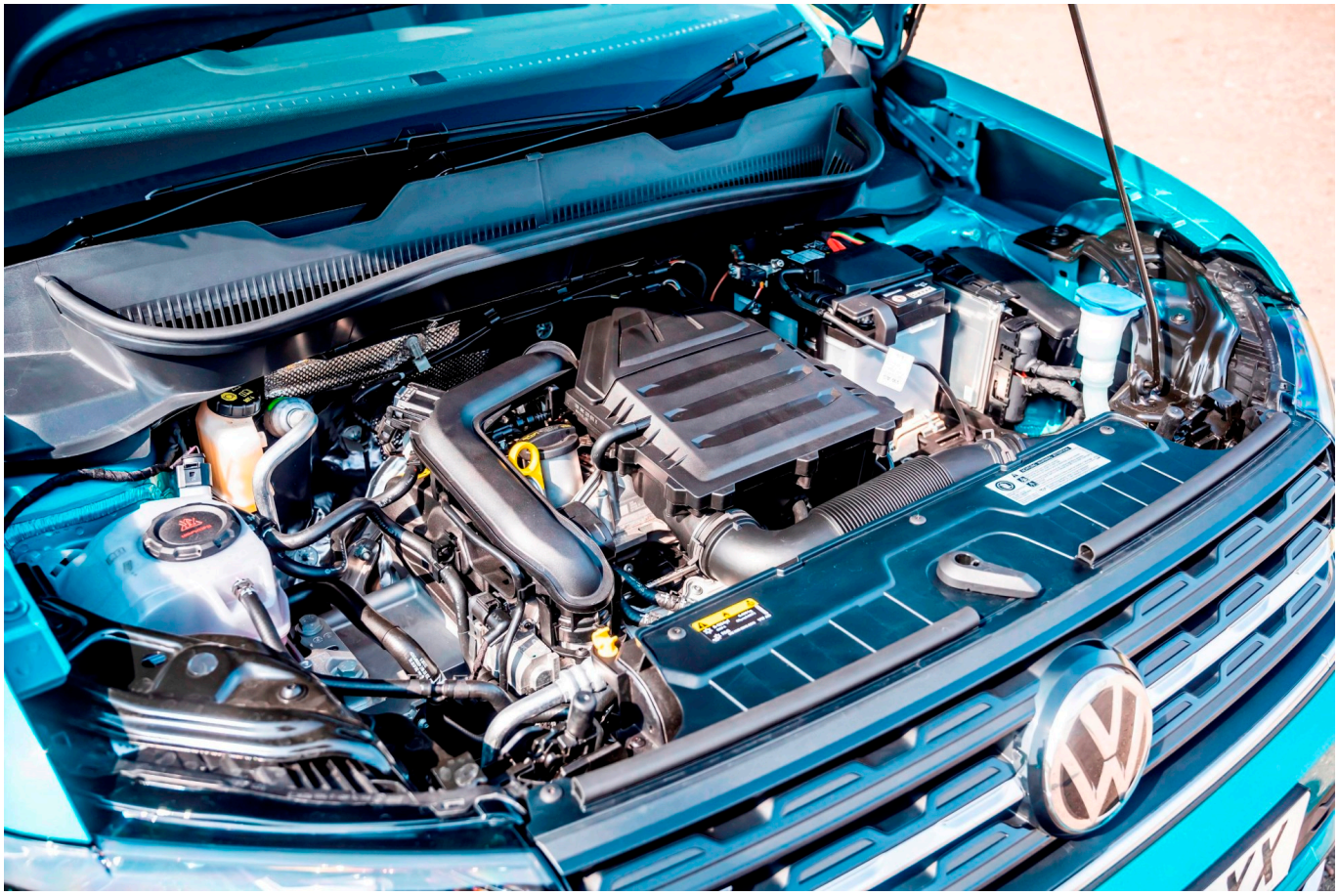
Put simply the T-Cross is a SUV version of VW's Polo supermini sized hatchback and is launched with the marketing strapline 'I am more'. It's a couple of inches longer than a Polo and just less than six inches taller but feels roomier inside and both the T-Cross and Polo have the same wheelbase length. The T-Cross for UK versions have as standard a sliding bench seat which expands the modest 385 litre (13.60 cu.ft) boot to 455 litres (16.07 cu.ft) without needing to fold down the rear seat backs with up to 1,281 litres (45.24 cu.ft) if the rear seat backs are lowered. With the bench seat in its most rearward position rear legroom is increased by 150 mm (5.91 in) but slide the seat fully forward and the legroom disappears almost completely. Headroom is ample throughout and the elevated seating positions give good visibility for all passengers.

So that's the T-Cross package, it's a tall muscular SUV styled version of the Polo, and prices start from £16,995 and go up to £25,055, and of course there is the choice of numerous extra cost options. The cheapest Polo with a less powerful petrol engine can be purchased for a shade over £14k. Both the T-Cross and Polo have five door hatchback body configurations.



The T-Cross might look like an SUV but all versions are only front wheel drive. At launch there is the choice of two engines, both 1.0 litre three cylinder TSI turbo petrol units with 95 or 115 hp power outputs. A diesel engine option is under consideration and might join the range later, and electric power could also become a choice further down the line. The lower power petrol unit provides 175 Nm (129 lb.ft) of torque, the other one 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) and both deliver this torque from 2,000 rpm. The 95hp unit comes with a five speed manual gearbox and CO2 emissions of 112 g/km, the 115 hp unit offers the choice of either a six speed manual or seven speed automatic transmission with CO2 figures, depending on the specification of 112/115 g/km for manual gearbox models and 111/112 for the autos

depending on the spec level.



As for performance the lower powered has a top speed of 112 mph and zero to 62 mph in 11.5 seconds; the more powerful unit figures are 120 mph and 10.2 seconds. The lesser powered unit provides a £750 saving over the 115 hp engine but the latter is expected to be the most popular choice.

But the drawback for price sensitive buyers is the 95hp engine is only available with a manual gearbox and only with S and SE spec levels whilst the 115 hp unit is available with SE, SEL and R-Line higher specifications and with manual and auto gearbox choices. The single best selling version is expected to be the SE 115 hp manual model priced at £19,555.

At the media launch this week Volkswagen UK wouldn't give any sales predictions, like so many other manufactures these days because of the global fall in demand for new cars.

However they did say they expect the T-Cross to become one of their best selling models, after their Golf range which sold 66,790 units last year and the Polo with 45,149 registrations, “It will be one of our top tier of Volkswagen models” said Mike Orford, Head of Press and Public Relations. Around half of UK T-Cross will go to retail customers, the rest to fleet, business and daily rental outlets.

Competitors for the T-Cross include the Citroen DS3 Crossback, Renault Captur, Vauxhall Mokka X, Suzuki Ignis/Jimny, Seat Arona, Kia Stonic, Audi Q2 and shortly the Skoda Kamiq. Time will tell whether it’s the young customers wanting a chic urban SUV who will the potential main buyers or more likely it will be the young at heart empty nesters who could ‘ditch’ their Polo or Golf hatchbacks for an SUV fashionably ideal for garden centre duties or youthful street-cred kerb appeal.

Spec levels are important considerations. Entry level S trim cars are identifiable by their 16-inch ‘alloy wheels, while the entire T-Cross range gets electrically adjustable and heated door mirrors as standard, in addition to an eight-inch touchscreen Composition Media infotainment system with VW Connect, rear LED tail lights, automatic headlights, Front Assist with the city emergency braking system, Predictive Pedestrian Protection, Lane Assist with blind spot plus lane keeping system, Hill Start Assist and an eCall system adds peace of mind connectivity.

The likely best-selling SE examples are equipped with 17-inch alloy wheels, black roof rails, front fog lights with cornering function, a leather-trimmed multifunction steering wheel, variable height boot floor, adaptive cruise control, app connect and a driver alert system.

SEL brings tinted windows, LED headlights and silver roof rails, front sport seats, carpet mats and an ambient lighting package. Climate control and a Discover Navigation system are also included, while a driver tiredness detection system and front and rear parking sensors also feature as standard.

Top-spec T-Cross R-Line models gain 18-inch alloy wheels, sporty R-Line exterior and

interior styling and VW's impressive Active Info Display. Needless to say there is a wide range of extra cost options, bright bodywork colour combinations and interior trim themes for those seeking to re-live their youth.

The interior is to be complemented more for its space, equipment and infotainment features more than its quality. There is a lack of soft-touch trim with more hard plastic moulded panels than ideal, painting a picture of 'built to a price'. However on a more positive note the T-Cross handles well, it's neat and nimble in traffic and copes well with winding country roads despite its high-riding tall suspension. It's very intuitive to drive, easy to park with good visibility, very much following the performance and capabilities of the Polo five door hatchbacks.

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As for the choice of engines? The 1.0 litre three cylinder 95 hp TSI unit is mated only with a five speed manual gearbox, and having driven this version around the winding Berkshire country roads it coped well enough without much sparkle and it lacked engine response below the 2,000 rpm level. Top speed is 112 mph, 0–62 mph takes 11.5 seconds. I would suggest this is the model to go for if urban travel is going to be the main type of journeys covered by owners and potentially as a second car in the family. The Combined Cycle fuel economy figure for this engine is 48.6 mpg with CO2 emissions of 112 g/km. On our test drive this engine returned a real-life figure of just 40.3 mpg, reflecting its lack of a sixth gear and just having to work that bit harder on hilly winding roads. The First Year VED road tax cost is £170 and then the Standard rate for year two onwards annual cost of £145. Company car drivers will pay 26% Benefit-in-Kind tax. The price of this SE 95 hp manual model is £18,805.



For those T-Cross owners wanting to use their vehicle for a wider variety of driving conditions including long motorway journeys, the 115 hp unit with a bit more torque and more importantly mated with a six speed gearbox, or the choice of a seven speed automatic transmission, will find this unit more responsive with a slightly better turn of speed and better real-life fuel economy, and more in the way of tax costs. Cruising along open roads, having the sixth gear ratio, reduced engine noise intrusion, thus creating a more refined drive. It has broader appeal in my opinion, coping really well with in-town traffic and well able to pick up the pace for open road and long distance travel duties. Top seed is 120 mph and 0–62 mph takes 10.2 seconds.

This 1.0 litre TSI 115 hp petrol unit with a manual gearbox has Combined Cycle figures of 48.3 mpg. The auto model’s figures range from 44.8 to 45.6 mpg.During my test driving on a

similar Berkshire rural route the real life figure for the manual gearbox model was an impressive 49 mpg. The price of this SE 115 hp manual model is £19,555.

As for CO2 figure this manual model is 112 g/km, the auto 111/112 g/km. The First year VED costs all fall into the same band of £170 First Year rate and then £145 Standard rate. Company car tax rates are 26/27% depending on spec wheel size. Insurance group ratings are 8E for the SE 95 hp version and 10E for the best selling SE 115 hp model. All versions are covered by Volkswagen Group's ungenerous three years/60,000 mile warranty.



VERDICT

The ‘I am more’ marketing strapline might be just about correct for the new VW T-Cross. In an over-populated, but still growing, SUV market, being small doesn’t mean in this case being skimpy on spec or bland for kerb appeal. VW might just find their popular Polo hatchback’s strongest sales contender is their own new T-Cross urban SUV.

For: Small in length with big sales and kerb appeal in an ever-growing compact SUV market, well-equipped, neat and nimble handling, compliant ride, good real-life fuel economy, versatile rear seat/load area design.

Against: Limited engine choice for the current range, 95 hp models best suited for urban driving use, hard plastic trim, ungenerous warranty.



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

Volkswagen T-Cross 1.0 TSI 115 hp, SE, six speed manual. (Expected best selling model).

Price: £19,555. (PCP example 35 months, £248 a month after a £3,840 customer deposit). Engine/transmission: 1.0 litre, three cylinder turbocharged petrol 115 hp, 200 Nm (148 lb.ft) of torque from 2,000 rpm, six speed manual, front wheel drive.

Performance: 120 mph, 0–62 mph 10.2 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.3 mpg (49 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 112 g/km, VED road tax £170/£145, BiK company car tax 26%.

Insurance Group: 10E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,235 mm (13.89 ft), W 1,779 mm (5.84 ft), H 1,584 mm (5.20 ft), wheelbase 2,551 mm (8.37 ft), boot/load space 385 to 1,281 litres (13.60 to 45.24 cu.ft), five doors; four/five seats.