VW Golf Estate R Road Test

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Wolfsburg in Sheep's Clothing?

Volkswagen's Golf Estate R test-driven by Tom Scanlan.

There's nothing else on the long, straight country road. The Golf R is at a standstill. I check the mirrors again and then shove my foot hard down on the pedal.

Growl-Pop, Growl-Pop from the exhaust… I've hit 70 or more maybe in about six seconds and the sound and feel is intoxicating.

The VW'S 6-speed DSG transmission is magically quick, the whole thing is enormous fun.

It's just a pity that you can't do this all the time – except on a track, where it would certainly be entertaining to see an estate car, because that was what I was driving, lapping furiously amongst all the other racers. The driver will have put the car into 'race' mode, one of the five modes that can be selected.

The VW Golf R 2.0-litre TSI 4-motion has 300 PS to play with. It will presumably often be carrying loads of one sort or another, that being its most prosaic function, so you can transport things fast if you want to. Security is aided by the automatic distribution of appropriate power to the four wheels.

Generally, of course, it will just be the day-to-day family hack…with that big punch usually remaining quietly packed away under the bonnet. And that's pretty well how I spent the week in the test car. Circumstances limited my driving to around a hundred and fifty miles, but the car took me through the usual variety of traffic conditions and from towns to motorways. On the motorway, the VW was particularly delightful, thanks to the plentiful torque being available from only 1,800 rpm. At 70 mph, the engine is spinning at 2,600 rpm.

The car's handling and speed-sensitive steering were excellent, but I wasn't quite able to avoid a front wheel hitting a brick-sized rock in the middle of a twisty country lane at about 40 mph. I thought I had got away with it – the tyre-pressure monitor did not react and so I carried on driving to my destination, a further twelve miles. Several hours later, and having forgotten all about the rock, I got back in to drive home and immediately felt that all was not well; on inspection, it was clear that the low-profile tyre was flat. I didn't notice any tyre-pressure warning when I had switched the ignition on. The wonderful AA man (I had called the VW assistance line) put the space-saver wheel on and off I went. After about five miles, the tyre-pressure warning flashed up. 'Oh no!' I said to myself, or words to that effect… here we go again, the space-saver is going flat. But it wasn't: I had forgotten that the ABS system had sussed out that something was different, but that it simply wasn't smart enough to know that it was only the space-saver.

Although the boot, nicely-carpeted and with versatile compartments, was spacious, the punctured wheel was a little over-sized to fit completely in the space-saver's well, so the floor over it was no longer flat. However, that is a whole lot better than those cars in which there is no space at all for a punctured wheel.

After that, I had thought that the rest of my week in the car was going to be carried out at no more than 50 mph, but VW kindly came out the next day and sorted me out with a new tyre – in fact, four new tyres so that all the wheels matched up.

Thus I was able to carry on exploring the R's capabilities. In short, very capable. It felt very strong, the brakes were terrific, the ride on its lowered 'sports' suspension was on the firm side and every little road nuance was at your finger tips, but the seats were so comfortable that that was not the irritation it might have been.

The VW's cabin was smart with various signature 'R's to remind you that you're in Wolfsburg's most powerful Golf; at night, it was particularly attractive with its clear, no-nonsense, white numbers on a black background with blue needles instrumentation and pencil-thin ambient blue light strips along the door-top upholstery.

So here is a car that is a lot of fun, is very practical and full of the latest technology in communications and information, along with a bucketful of safety features. Some of these were options that overall amounted to almost £7,000. See below for the eye-watering price in total. It's more than a good idea to learn all about what the car has on board and how to use it; for example, you can set the distance at which the car will brake autonomously. On one occasion, I just managed to stop as a driver came straight out in front of me at a give-way cross-roads; fortunately, I had only been doing about 20 mph. It turned out that I could have had the auto system reacting sooner by selecting the 'car' settings appropriately.

In fact, the car was driven mainly rather sedately and the overall consumption, according to the trip computer came out at 29.9 mpg. The range on a full tank would be up to three hundred and fifty miles.

VERDICT

As estates go, it looks good and I loved it!

Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

VW Golf Estate 2.0 litre TDI 4MOTION 300 PS 6 speed DSG.

Max. power: 300 PS @ 5,500 to 6,200 rpm.

Max. torque: 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) @ 1,800 to 5,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 5.1 seconds.

Top speed: 155 mph.

Fuel Consumption: Official Combined 40.4 mpg (Achieved on test, 29.9 mpg).

CO2 emissions: 162 g/km.

Taxation: VED band G (£180). BIK 29%.

Insurance Group: 34E.

Total price of test car incl. tax: £41,691.