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VW Passat GTE Hybrid Estate Road Test

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Chris Adamson test drives Volkswagen's fabulous plug-in hybrid Passat estate...

Volkswagen is fighting back from the emissions rigging scandal and the latest Passat shows that they are returning to their technological best with a stylish and hugely practical plug-in hybrid.

First unveiled at the Paris Motor Show in September 2014 – before all the ‘diesel-gate’ crisis – the Passat GTE Hybrid arrived in the UK this autumn and adds another dimension to the hybrid story.



It is available as either a saloon or an estate, the latter (as tested here) adds about a £1,500 premium to the starting price but also loads more functionality which is just what is needed for today's modern all-purpose lifestyle.

Passat looks like any other fashionable estate car, you can tell it is Germanic in origin even without the badge and to all intents and purposes that is just exactly what it is.

But nestling under the bonnet is a seemingly tiny, lightweight (aluminium crankcase), four cylinder 1.4 litre direct-injection turbocharged petrol (TSI) engine which on its own develops a healthy 156 PS from 5,000 rpm and has a maximum torque of 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) between 1,500 and 3,500 rpm.

However, this being a hybrid means there is more to come, thanks to the inclusion of an electric motor that can supply an additional 115 PS and is good for up to 31 miles on electric power only.

This motor is driven by a 96 cell 9.8 kWh lithium-ion battery fitted under the floor below the rear seats – the battery comes with an eight-year/100,000 mile warranty.



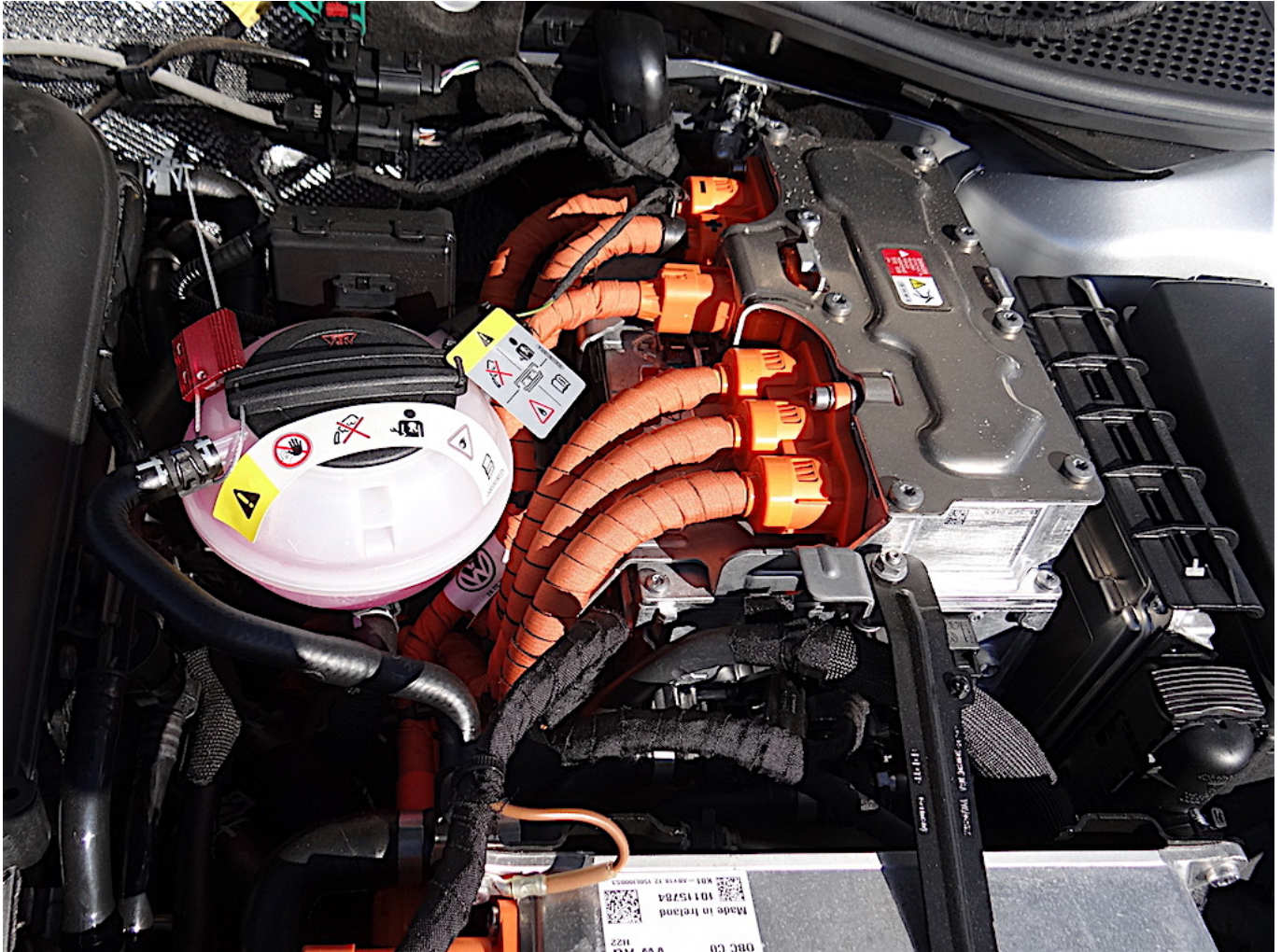
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This is engaged via a Battery Management Controller and can be re-charged using a standard UK domestic mains supply in just over four hours or in two and a half hours from a 3.6 kW supply.

Together the petrol engine and electric motor have as a combined propulsion system producing 218 PS and a substantial peak torque of 400 Nm (295 lb.ft).



In ultimate economy mode Volkswagen claims 166 mpg and emissions of just 39 g/km with a maximum theoretical range of 692 miles if you exhaust the 9.9 kWh battery and the 50 litre (11 gallon) petrol tank. In reality anything over 400 is going to be acceptable to most owners.

Moving away from the engine technology, the Passat looks very normal with a sleek, well-proportioned body and a capacious interior.

One particularly welcome feature is the generous rear leg room, something these days that is worth pointing out as back seat occupants often get overlooked. Those rear seats split 60



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/ 40 to offer different load and passenger configurations.

Further back, the business end of the Passat has a conveniently low boot sill entry and a flat load floor, leaving a storage space uncluttered by intrusions so you can maximise the load potential.



Up front the well-appointed cabin is dominated by a slim line dashboard with a comprehensive instrument readout that allows drivers to view and manage many functions of the vehicle via the broad touch screen.



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On the Road

On its own the electric motor can provide up to 330 Nm (243 lb.ft) of torque from near standstill, which means it can move away rather briskly without a sound and VW even goes so far as to claim that in this mode the Passat is good for 81 mph.

That requires a very gentle and progressive application of the throttle, beyond the eagerness of most drivers, so that in reality the petrol engine is soon bursting into life to propel it to more acceptable speeds.

In tandem this will take the estate to a breezy and somewhat unexpected 62 mph in well below eight seconds and even then the combined units don't sound to be struggling.

For the person in charge there is a choice of driving modes including Economy, Normal, Sport and an Individual setting that allows more flexibility of driving style but takes some time to set-up.

On top of this the driver can switch between full electric (only really practical in slow-moving urban traffic) or hybrid modes.

Power is sent to the front wheels via a specially developed six-speed DSG gearbox which



features a third, disengagement clutch. This decouples the TSI motor whenever possible to allow the vehicle to make the best use of the kinetic energy inherent in a moving vehicle.

In physical terms this means that when you lift-off the accelerator the Passat doesn't coast in a normal fashion; it uses the rolling momentum of the vehicle to generate energy which is fed back into the battery unit.

For newcomers this can be a bit of an acquired technique to adapt to but it shouldn't take too long and after that the Passat becomes a driver friendly and very comfortable vehicle to use on a daily basis.

Verdict

As well as the obvious advantage of fuel economy, the Passat Hybrid also ticks all the boxes for emissions – it shows just how long it is possible to drive with zero emissions at the start of a journey and for those who travel regularly in an urban environment this has got to be good news, especially with the controversy over the particle emissions from diesel vehicles in slow moving situations.

As well as being an efficient form of transport, the Passat is also a hugely practical one that allows a driver to have the benefits of hybrid power without sacrificing space, looks and functionality.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Vehicle: VW Passat GTE Hybrid

Engine: 1395cc and 103 kW electric motor

Transmission: Six-speed DSG automatic

Power: 218 PS combined



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Torque: 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) combined

Performance:

0-62 mph: 7.6 seconds

Top Speed: 140 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Combined: 166 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 39 g/km

Price (On the Road plus Government grant): £38,075