

# TORQUE

Little Volkswagen diesel punches above its weight

By Joe Sage



**W**e all know good things come in small packages. Here's proof. Launched in 1974, the Volkswagen Golf (called Rabbit at first, and recently again, briefly, in the US) is now in its sixth generation. The new body was penned by Walter de'Silva, designer of the award-winning Audi A5/S5, among others. Nice basis for an econocar.

But is that what this is? It's certainly affordable. The base 2.5-liter gasoline-powered VW Golf starts at just \$17,490. The 2.0-liter diesel-powered TDI 6-speed manual starts at \$21,990. What do you get for your money?

Here's where econocar starts seeming like the wrong term. All Golf models include (hold your breath): adjustable intermittent front wipers, Climatic A/C, cruise control, highline instrument cluster w/compass, outside temp and trip computer, metal-look interior trim, pollen filter, power locks, outlets, steering, and windows, easy entry 8-way manual sport front seats, 8-speaker sound system w/CD (MP3 readable), split-folding rear seat, daytime running lights, dual exhaust tips, power heated exterior mirrors, 4-link fully independent rear suspension, 15" steel wheels w/wheel covers and all-season tires, rear window wiper, dual front airbags, front side thorax airbags, front/read head curtain airbags, and an alphabet soup including ESP, ASR, EDL, EBD, ABS, LATCH and TPMS. With some vehicles, the price of all this, as options, could approach the total price of the Golf.

But wait. With the TDI, you get all that *and* (hang onto your hat) add all this: 3-spoke leather-wrapped, multi-function steering wheel, leather shift knob and brake handle, Premium 8 touch-screen sound system w/in-dash CD changer, 6-month Sirius® subscription, MDI w/iPod cable, fog lights, sport suspension (with vehicle lowering), 17" Porto alloy wheels w/performance all-season tires, armrest and floor mats.

So they must nail you with options? Will you need to buy a bunch of packages just to get a few key things? Well, first off, key things aren't missing in the base package. And no, there are a few great options, they're

à la carte, and the prices are right: power tilt and sliding sunroof \$1000, cold weather package (heated seats and washer nozzles) \$225, Bluetooth® \$199, rear side airbags (4-door) \$350, xenon headlamps \$700, 300-watt audio \$476 and full navigation package \$1750. Our test TDI came with nav, sunroof, cold weather package and Bluetooth, and still stickered at \$26,514 including destination. Very complete, and still a bargain.

The 2.0L clean diesel TDI engine emits 25 percent less greenhouse gas and achieves over 30 percent better fuel economy compared to a similar gasoline engine, using an advanced electronically-controlled turbocharger and electronically-controlled direct injection. The 2-liter produces 140 hp at 4,000 rpm, but the real magic is in the diesel grunt: an impressive 236 lb.ft. of torque kicking in between 1,750 and 2,500 rpm. And that's where the fun really begins. Pop it into first, hit the pedal, and off you go with a startling burst of power. But that's just the beginning. Shift into second, and it happens all over again. Third, same. Fourth, same. And beyond. This amount of torque, especially coupled with the 6-speed manual, never quits. On tap in prodigious quantities and at low RPMs, it gives you a new kick in the pants every few seconds. Top notch fun performance. The TDI is rated 30 mpg city and 41 mpg highway, with a 0-to-60 mph time of 8.6 seconds. It feels *much* quicker than that.

This VW is all fun yet strictly business. Black window trim and the absence of side moldings keep things clean. A hatch spoiler with integrated third brake light is painted to match the body. Updated taillights mimic the headlights and feature integrated clear turn signal and reverse indicators along the bottom edge. Running lights are blended into the lower rear bumper which adds a blacked out insert and a cutout for a pair of exhaust tips. Available in both two-door and four-door models, the interior is a very attractive Titan Black cloth. Paints include the usual black, white, silver, grey and red, as well as two blues, one of which is the distinctive Shark Blue Metallic of our test car. Fire one up. ■



## GOLF TDI LOGBOOK NOTES

- One small stick of diesel dynamite.
- This fuel-sipping pocket rocket is a brute in gnat's clothing.
- Manual seat adjustment and a long reach to the clutch pedal, even if you're tall.
- Console storage is big enough for a roll of Lifesavers and an iPod (for which it's wired).
- Heavy torque makes it easy to stall.
- Accelerator response is *very* impressive.
- This car shifts very well and has power in every gear, thanks to diesel torque.
- Audio is way above average. We adjust tone and fader to the Smashing Pumpkins and find *tons* of margin: it already sounds great with just slight nudges to treble and bass and one little nudge of fade to the rear.
- Amazingly no presence of torque steer characteristics. Tried a little mini-slalom to put it to the test. Extremely impressive.
- Performed lateral acceleration moves, around a roundabout at high speed, then into a slight "S" series. All very solid and sure.
- Test cars bring competitors out of the woodwork, giving us an idea on market perceptions and pecking orders. Despite a relatively low-key color on the VW, it promptly brought on a Lexus SC, who definitely wanted to race, or compete for space. He loses.
- We've been exposed to diesel SUVs, addressing fuel economy in incremental ways, but now we see why Denise McCluggage is so bullish on diesel: the pulling power of diesel torque is unbelievable.
- "Unbelievable" is the word that escapes our lips repeatedly, whether it's handling, absence of torque steer (different kind of torque) or acceleration in all gears and situations. Checked the sticker price and voiced the same word, unbelievable: 26 grand.
- Has cornering lights, even without a signal, e.g. at a bend or into the driveway. Nice.
- Diesel delight.
- Pop it into first gear, you get decent acceleration, but when you pop it into 2nd, and 3rd, that's when the fun has begun...!
- Incredible turning circle. Did a U-turn on a simple divided boulevard and was able to do it from inside lane to inside lane.
- Tight suspension and firm steering.
- Felt a little stupid trying to open the rear hatch. Used the key fob at first, but had warning lights that it was open when we didn't think so. Finally realized there is a solid release hidden under the VW emblem.
- Test car came with no manual, but the HVAC controls seem *ultra*-simple and a little bit different. Turn on the a/c separately, choose your fan spots separately, no "auto" button. Temperature is set with a simple blue-to-red knob, which works fine.
- This very fun and well-equipped car costs little, uses little fuel... what's not to like?