

Connected

with the road and with its heritage
By Joe Sage

Just as every Volkswagen fan is finally clear on the distinctions and timelines of various badging of Rabbit, Golf, GTI (and for that matter even Jetta), as well as global variants, along comes a new iteration: the VW Golf GTI Rabbit Edition.

Here's a basic orientation. Not counting the electric e-Golf, there are three Golf models: the basic 147-hp Golf from \$21,845; the 228-hp Golf GTI from \$27,595; and the 288-hp Golf R from \$41,290. All are available with your choice of 6-speed manual or 7-speed Tiptronic automatic transmission. All are front-drivers, except the Golf R with 4MOTION all-wheel drive. All this year are four-doors, something that has forced apples-and-oranges decisions among models in certain years prior, notably with the R32, which preceded the Golf R.

Last year, there was a top-dollar Autobahn special edition of the Golf GTI (reportedly still available, at \$35,070). This year's Rabbit Edition falls more toward the affordable end, as did the original VW Rabbit of the 1970s and '80s, itself somewhat picking up the spot the original Beetle had vacated. Thus the new Rabbit Edition is built upon the base Golf GTI S trim, bumping its price by just \$1300. (Note that our sample's Monroney sticker base of \$29,995 differs from the price on the consumer website, which is currently \$28,895.)

The extra bucks bring you black highlights (18-inch gloss alloy wheels, Vmax rear spoiler, side

mirrors), heritage Clark Plaid cloth seats, and low-key Rabbit Edition accents inside and out (seat accents, red-stitched floor mats, and a tastefully tiny exterior badge).

The car is available in four colors: white or black pearl (both available throughout the Golf lineup), our sample's Urano Gray (available only on the GTI Rabbit Edition or the e-Golf) and a bright Cornflower Blue unique (at least among Golfs) to the Rabbit Edition—not even the Golf R, available in a whopping 45 different colors, offers this blue. Since its performance is the same as other GTI models, and its style points are its differentiators, we'd therefore likely choose Cornflower Blue, the most pure expression (and perhaps most future-collectible) of the GTI Rabbit Edition.

We got into our week with this GTI straight out of a 577-hp, \$137,000 performance SUV, so whereas the VW didn't feel like a rocket immediately, we did note that it felt particularly solid and connected from the get-go, especially nice since ours had the automatic (it's an end-to-end, metal-mated-to-metal feel we usually expect to find only in a manual drivetrain). We also reminded ourselves that we could buy four and a half GTI Rabbit Editions for the price of that performance SUV.

We'd always welcome the power of the Type R, but its 26.3 percent more horses than GTI come at a 49.6 percent higher price. And whereas we love the Type R's 4MOTION all-wheel-drive, we noted superb handling and no front-drive torquiness in the GTI, itself an admir-

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L inline-4, 16v, turbo/intercooled
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HP/TORQUE	228 hp / 258 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.6:1
TRANSMISSION	7-spd DSG auto/Tiptronic
SUSPENSION	F: strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, 24mm stblzr bar; R: multi-link w coils, telescopic dampers, 20mm stblzr bar
STEERING	rack & pinion, electric power assist
BRAKES	F: 13.4x1.2 vented; R: 12.2x0.9 vented
WHEELS / TIRES	18x7.5J alum alloy / 225/40R18
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	168.0 / 103.6 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.8 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.51 in
SEATING	five
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.4 / 38.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.2 / 35.6 in
CARGO CAPACITY	22.8 / 52.7 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3256 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	reg (hp/lbft stated w prem) / 13.2 gal
MPG	25/31/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE **\$29,995**

RABBIT EDITION INCLUDES: 18" gloss black alloy wheels, black Vmax rear spoiler, black side mirror caps, Clark Plaid cloth seats w Rabbit Edition accents, Rabbit Edition red-stitched floor mats front & rear.

DESTINATION CHARGE 895

TOTAL **\$30,890**

able achievement too few can match.

The magic of the GTI Rabbit Edition formula is that it is not only well connected to the road, but also connected to decades of brand heritage.

Compared with both that 577-hp SUV and with the more potent Golf Type R, it's almost as though you can feel what each of the GTI Rabbit Edition's 228 horses is doing, through your fingertips, as surely as if they were a real living, breathing harnessed team. And that provides its own thrill. ■

