

THE CAR MAN

Tim Saunders



SKODA OCTAVIA VRS

"It's got the same electric seat as the Volkswagen van," observes my son Henry (3) on assessing the Skoda Octavia VRS Challenge. He's a clever lad. Previously, we had tested a VW Caravelle Executive and he's quite right about the driver's seat.

Economies of scale dictate that the Volkswagen Group, which owns 12 manufacturers including Skoda, Bentley and Seat, will use the same or similar parts and features across its range; a sensible idea.

Excellent quality is something that we have become used to from the Volkswagen family and this Skoda is another shining example (quite literally from that gorgeous velvet red metallic paintwork).

I think the beautifully crafted black alloy wheels compliment this souped-up saloon making it really quite eye-catching; my wife disagrees thinking that they look a little out of place.

Even so, a Jaguar XF parks next to the Skoda and the driver cannot take his eyes off the Octavia.

The Skoda Octavia has won legions of fans including the British traffic police, who can often be seen in them pulling speeding motorists over by the roadside.

The driving position is as I would expect; excellent - and all my family agrees that it provides a very comfortable environment. There's adequate room in the rear for three passengers. But despite its size it's a real struggle strapping in my three children in their car seats. Dare I say it; it's easier in my geriatric and considerably tinier Ford Fiesta.

On the Skoda a push button ignition replaces the traditional key on the steering column. It is quick, especially when sports mode is engaged by pushing the VRS button; 0 to 60mph in 6.6secs and a 155mph top speed. Put your foot to the floor in second gear and it will reach 70mph as quickly as you can say 'Jack Robinson'. What a delight. I enjoy using the decisive six speed manual gearbox and there's a traditional handbrake.

The Skoda comes loaded with luxuries including heated front seats, cruise control, aluminium pedals, black exhaust tailpipes with sports sound and there's even an umbrella under the front passenger seat. At night there's some fun blue lighting on the door inserts.

This sizeable sports saloon is a top class driver's car but the overall experience could still be enhanced further, I feel.

Facts at a glance

Octavia VRS Challenge

Vauxhall Insignia 1.5 Elite Turbo

Price: £30,770

Engine: 2.0 TSI

Power: 245bhp

Economy: 36mpg approx

Watch the video at www.testdrives.biz