

Road test: VW Golf

by Tim Saunders



A well established, steady and reliable vehicle.

That'll be the Volkswagen Golf, now in its eighth generation. It sounds like a long established family when you put it that way.

Actually 35m have been sold since it was introduced in 1974, one every 41 seconds or 780,000 a year! Now that's a successful car.

It has always struck me as an aspirational car for many. My old boss drove a black Golf GTi and liked it a lot.

Externally this stylish new model looks a little more modern and crisp than its ancestors. The simple alloys show that this isn't a fussy car either. It's all about practicality and reliability. Looking at the boot I notice how it shares similarities with my 18 year old Ford Fiesta because the glass window on both goes right to the edge; there's no metal frame down the sides. I've always liked that and it shows that this is quite a timeless piece of design.

Just opening the boot is enjoyable. Push the top of the large circular VW logo in and pull. This reveals a good size space and a steel space saving spare wheel. It is only on lifting the boot lid that you realise this model isn't the top of the range because there's no switch to push the boot lid down automatically, only an obvious space for where it would be.

Inside the rear seats provide enough room for our three children. Harriett (9) is now tall enough not to require a car seat and so she sits in the middle of Henry (4) and Heidi (7) is theirs. They're all comfy. There's enough leg room for all of us and the driving position is as I expect; very good indeed. The Soul Maze cloth upholstery is comfortable.

This model, finished in dolphin grey metallic, is called a mild hybrid thanks to the use of clever technology which makes it more efficient than standard petrol models. It comes with a seven speed automatic DSG box, which is futuristic by design and there are paddleshifts either side of the steering wheel should more engaging driving be required. The whole dashboard is modern

and digital. There's a push button start in the centre by the gearbox and an electric handbrake. Our driveway slopes downwards a little and when engaging reverse and lifting the parking brake the car unnervingly rolls forward. This can be prevented though by engaging the hold button.

My children discover that there's a neat drink bottle holder in the front centre console that moves into place by the push of a button. There are lights beside the external door handles; helpful for lighting the way at night. There's all round electric windows, heated steering wheel, air conditioning and the children once again discover that if you pull the rear centre armrest down it is possible to open the plastic to reveal a hole, ideal for oars, skis or anything long and awkward. That air conditioning isn't strong enough on a very hot day, though and the windows need to be down, too. There's no sat nav so I use mine.

We drive to Surrey down the A3 where you can always be guaranteed to see both marked and unmarked police cars whipping up and down with their lights flashing. The children love to see this. The Golf has an intelligent cruise control that once engaged will go with the flow of the traffic. So if the car in front slows down so does the Golf and if it speeds up so do we. Not just that though because the system will alert the driver to the speed limit and if they take their foot off the accelerator it will slow down to the correct speed without any driver intervention. Clever stuff. Driving in the middle lane of the motorway a warning suddenly flashes up on the dash telling me to stay in the lane accompanied by beeping, which is off putting and not required but there doesn't seem to be a way to turn it off. I can see that to some incompetent motorist texting on their iPhone as they drive (some motorists do this you know) this might be a necessary tool but not for me.

It's an impressive car, comfortable and pretty economical delivering around 48mpg. So it will travel about 550 miles on a 50-litre tank of fuel.

Another trip sees us travelling down the A303 to Tiverton in Devon and it makes light work of it. Overall it's still the family hatchback to beat.

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FACTS AT A GLANCE

VW Golf Life 1.5 TSi 110PS

Price of model tested: £29,410

Top speed: 139mph

0 to 60mph: 8.5secs

Power: 110bhp

Economy: 48mpg

CO₂ emissions: 130 g/km

