

Getting back into the hot Seat

By Tim Saunders

WE ALL NEED A kick up the backside at times. It does us good. Removes any complacency that might have crept in without us realising. That's certainly how I feel when I sit behind the wheel of the Seat Leon FR estate. You see driving my 2002 Ford Fiesta diesel is okay but if we're honest, uneventful, even bland. I'm not complaining, it does what I need it to do with few complaints and is very inexpensive. I see a lot of me in it and everything about Fred is fine.

But the Seat is a definite contrast. The driver's seat hugs me closely, making me feel secure and very much at home. This is a petrol, so it's always an unfair comparison to my diesel. A petrol engine is usually always smoother and more responsive. Definitely the case in the Seat. The 6-speed manual box is pretty slick to operate. And in fact my whole joy of driving

returns as soon as I open the driver's door. Yes, fun can still be had behind the wheel thanks to Seat. And what's more, this is an estate. It certainly doesn't feel it. It's as nimble as many a hot hatch I've driven. It's fairly low to the ground, too. Often when a car is so low it causes a problem on our driveway, which has a bit of a ridge at the top. When all my family have sat in a Bentley or a Jaguar and I have reversed off the drive, there has been an unpleasant scrape of the underside. You never can tell whether this will happen before it takes place. To my surprise although the Seat is low to the ground nothing untoward occurs when we're all sat in it and reverse out of the driveway or drive into it for that matter. What a great car. Driving a low-slung car makes it feel faster. Slam it into second, listen to the gravelly growl of the exhaust, floor it and smile.



FACTS AT A GLANCE

**SEAT LEON
1.5 TSI EVO FR**

Price: £25,655

Top speed: 130mph

0 to 60mph: 9.7secs

Economy: 50.2mpg

Power: 128bhp

Watch the video at

www.testdrives.biz

As the price of fuel continues to sky-rocket it is nice to drive a car that returns over 50mpg, meaning that it should be possible to get 500 miles from a full tank while driving at sensible speeds rather than having to rigidly stick to 56mph to achieve such a target. During a trip to Somerset I notice that this is a rather clever car because for instance, when cruise control is engaged at 70mph on the motorway it stops working on four cylinders and cuts down to two. In my mind firing on half its cylinders must further aid efficiency. Clever stuff.

The sizeable boot allows us to collect a good amount of hay for the children's rabbits with plenty of room to spare for coats and sports equipment for an afternoon of fun and games.

The build quality is high and the doors close with a satisfying thunk.

I'm surprised that there is not a reversing camera, though; the driver must make do with only warning bleeps and their own skill when reversing. This would be acceptable if it was a smaller hatchback but that cumber-

some boot makes it more challenging, calling for extra care, which inevitably means taking more time when manoeuvring.

"It's a bit basic," states my eldest daughter, Harriett (11).

At her tender age the little monkey has been in hundreds of cars but I disagree with her. There are electric windows front and back, air conditioning, power-folding wing mirrors.

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