

MOTORING

Tim Barnes-Clay can't get enough of the newly released VW Golf



WOW! I can never get enough of the Volkswagen Golf. It's just such a satisfying car to drive.

The fresh Golf, which went on sale in the UK in January is undoubtedly one of the safest cars of its size around. All of the latest models come with seven airbags, including a driver's knee airbag, five three-point seatbelts, braking and stability aids, electronic differential lock and Isofix preparation for two rear child seats.

Unsurprisingly, the 2013 VW Golf has received a top five star rating from the European consumer protection organisation Euro NCAP.

But what's the eagerly awaited Golf like? Well, it's lighter, more advanced, more spacious, more efficient and better equipped than before. The VW also offers improved value, with UK prices starting at just £16,330 – that's lower than those of its predecessor.

Behind the wheel, it's difficult to fault the precise nature of the Golf's drive. Steering is ultra-direct, cornering is superb and ride comfort sublime. It's spacious enough for a small family and a total blast to drive on your own. The VW, in any guise, makes a superb commuting tool and in the week I drove it, it made light work of my daily A14 commute from Newmarket to the Midlands.

The Golf is available in the UK in three trim levels: S, SE and GT (the GTI and BlueMotion models will join the line-up later in the year). Four petrol engines and two diesel engines are available to order.



'A total blast to drive' – the new Volkswagen Golf

New Golf drives better than ever

The petrol engine range starts with a four-cylinder 1.2-litre TSI unit producing 85 PS, rising via a 1.2-litre TSI 105 PS and a 1.4-litre TSI 122 PS motor to the all-new 1.4-litre TSI 140 PS engine with Active Cylinder Technology.

The two diesel engines are a 1.6-litre TDI 105 PS and a new 2.0-litre TDI 150 PS unit. All new Golf models – both diesel and petrol – come with a Stop/Start system as standard, along with battery regeneration. Gearboxes are a mixture of five- and six-speed manuals, and six and seven-speed DSG units, depending on the engines' power and torque outputs.

Standard specification levels build on those of the outgoing Golf, bringing new items of luxury and technology to the class. The entry-level Composition Media system includes a 5.8-inch colour

touchscreen, DAB digital radio, a CD player, MDI interface (for connecting iPod or MP3 player), Bluetooth telephone preparation and audio streaming and eight speakers. Also standard is 'Climatic' semi-automatic air conditioning, among a host of other features.

Moving up from S to SE trim brings an outstanding range of features, including Automatic Distance Control with Front Assist and City Emergency Braking, which can even bring the vehicle to a complete halt if necessary.

From the outside, the GT model can be recognised by its 17-inch 'Dijon' alloy wheels, front fog lights and air intakes with chrome surrounds, 'Cherry Red' rear light clusters, and heat-insulating dark-tinted rear glass. Inside there are gloss black decorative inserts, LED reading lights and ambient lighting in the doors and centre console.

So, is the 2013 Golf worth buying or choosing as the next company car? Absolutely! The only thing that's let the VW Golf down in the past is its ubiquity. But there's a reason for it – Golfs are just so blooming good that everyone, at some stage in their lives, wants one.

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All the kit you could ever need

If the high levels of kit you'll find in the new Golf still don't quite 'float your boat', there's a multitude of optional equipment available. This includes high beam assist, lane assist and park assist (which is able to parallel-park the Golf in spaces only 80 cm longer than the car itself in addition to providing automatic end-on parking).

You can also select from a choice of alternative alloy wheels up to 18 inches in diameter, bi-xenon headlights, 'Vienna' leather upholstery, 2Zone climate control, the Discover Pro navigation system with 8-inch colour touchscreen, keyless entry and a panoramic sunroof, among other options.