



SEAT LEON FR 2.0 TDI 150 PS

SEAT enjoyed a record-breaking year for sales in the UK in 2012 – its best since the brand was introduced into the country in 1985.

And the Spanish auto-maker's popularity is likely to continue, if the all-new Leon is anything to go by. Indeed, the hatchback which was first launched in 1999, is unquestionably one of SEAT's most significant cars ever.

I drove SEAT's athletic version of the Leon - the FR. Those letters stand for Formula Racing, so, predictably, the car comes with 'sporty' features. These include 17-inch alloy wheels, dark tinted rear windows, and front sports seats.

The driver's seat is set lower than that of the previous Leon, but has a broad range of movement, as does the steering wheel. This provides a confident driver set-up – and a fun one, especially when you hit the road after selecting 'Sport' from the SEAT Drive Profile. This is a menu of driving modes which allows you to change the character of the Leon. On the list of options you can also choose Normal, Eco or Individual set-up. It's a cool bit of gadgetry and is accessed at the touch of a button.

The Leon FR 2.0 TDI 150 will sprint from 0-62mph in 8.4 seconds and on to 134mph. The SEAT hugs the corners as though super-glued to the road. In fact body roll is virtually non-existent – it feels a million miles away from a standard, efficient, family hatch. But it's not that far from one as far as fuel savings go. In fact, fuel economy is startlingly efficient with the oil-burner averaging 68.9 mpg.

But, most importantly, the Leon has been awarded the maximum five-star rating by Euro NCAP in its safety tests. It scored 94 percent and 92 percent for the adult occupant and child occupant elements respectively. What more could you ask for? Not a lot. And if I had £21,385, I'd be buying a Leon FR now.

Max speed: 134 mph
0-62 mph: 8.4 secs
Combined mpg: 68.9
Engine: 1968 cc 4 cylinder
16 valve turbo diesel
Max. power (bhp): 148 at 3500 - 4000 rpm
Max. torque (lb/ft): 236 at 1750 - 3000 rpm
CO2: 106 g/km
Price: £21,385 on the road



SEAT TOLEDO

On the road, the new Toledo is no speed-demon, but it always has enough 'get up and go' to prevent accusations of sluggishness. Its 1598cc, 16 valve, four cylinder turbo diesel engine produces 103bhp – and that's enough to get you from 0-62mph in 10.4 seconds.

Top speed is a more-than-respectable 118mph and CO2 emissions are low at only 106g/km. That means the Toledo is not only eco-friendly, the small amount of carbon dioxide it releases into the atmosphere also brings it into cheap annual road tax territory.

The SEAT embraces corners and soaks up lumps and bumps without difficulty. The switchgear is nicely damped and the steering is direct. The well-weighted wheel also gives you good feedback – thoroughly communicating what the road surface is like beneath the four rubber corners.

Looks-wise, the latest Toledo is peculiar. It has the appearance of a saloon but actually it's a hatchback. The front looks modern, with aggressively shaped headlights, but the further back you go, SEAT's designers have lost their way. The rear-end is the visual equivalent of a song that's been 'faded-out' because the guys in the recording studio didn't have a clear-cut way to finish the track.

My test car, in SE 1.6 TDI Ecomotive 105 PS guise, produced 70.6mpg. That's pretty staggering. The tank is big too – with a potential range of around 600 miles.

The standard safety package for all SEAT Toledos includes driver and passenger airbags, front side, head and thorax airbags. The car is available from as little as £12,500 on the road, but the flagship form I test drove comes with a price-tag of over five grand more at £17,840.

Max speed: 118 mph
0-62 mph: 10.4 secs
Combined mpg: 70.6
Engine: 1598 cc 4 cylinder
16 valve turbo diesel
Max. power (bhp): 103 at 4400 rpm
Max. torque (lb/ft): 184 at 1500 rpm
CO2: 106 g/km
Price: £17,840