

MOTORING MATTERS by Anthony Goodwin

VW TOUAREG A SOPHISTICATED 4 X 4

Since its launch in 2003 the Touareg has proved to be one of the more sophisticated 4x4s on the market. The latest generation has some great new technical upgrades to include rollover protection, absplus and optional trailer stabilisation. Having been designed from scratch VW has been able to start with a clean sheet and put some class leading tech in from the outset. So you get permanent four wheel drive, hill start and decent assist. ABSplus is a pioneering braking system which works in conjunction with the abs system to increase the braking effectiveness on loose surfaces.



VW recently updated the exterior of the Touareg with a new chrome grille and re-profiled headlights and front wings. Another little change is the re-profiled and aerodynamic wing mirrors which now incorporate side indicators. As you move around to the rear there are some subtle changes to the tailgate and new rear lights and a new bumper. Thanks to the complex three part door sealing system, waterproof headlights and a special air intake system the Touareg is capable of fording depths of up to 500mm.

Refinement inside is more akin to a luxury saloon than a 4x4, to the point that there are specially absorbent materials in the roof lining, luggage compartment, pillar trim and dashboard to aid in noise reduction. Leather upholstery is standard on all but entry level model. Standard equipment includes front and rear electric windows, delta radio system with 10 speakers, drivers, passenger and curtain airbags.

Now for engines, well there are four to choose from. You can have a 3.6 24 valve V6 petrol if fuel economy or your surname is Ewing! Figures for the petrol are 0 – 62 in 8.6 seconds with a top speed of 135, mpg is 21 combined. There are 3 diesels to choose from a 2.5 TDi 10 valve with DPF, 3.0 TDi 24 valve V6 or the range topping 5.0 TDi 20 valve V10. Fuel economy figures are 27 mpg for the 2.5 TDi, 28 for the 3.0 TDi V6 and 23 for the 5.0 TDi V10. All four engines road tax is £405 per year with insurance groups 15 – 19.

So how does it drive? Well for a car of its size and stature it drives very much like any large saloon car, just with a higher seating position. I do take pleasure in driving a 4x4 and especially the higher seating position you get. Motorways were sublime - with cruise control on the miles just flew by. When I took it onto those A and B roads the ride and handling was good with acceleration which made over taking a breeze. Round town its surprising nimble and the auto box is very impressive. The only thing that takes a bit of getting used to is the size, the Touareg is reasonably wide and long. Personally I would choose the V6 TDi version in SE trim.

Prices start from £31,290 for the 2.5 TDi with the 5.0 TDi V10 R50 being £64,140.

GIVE YOUR WINDSCREEN AN MOT

Auto Windscreens is predicting a fourfold increase in the number of vehicles that will fail their MOT due to windscreen damage caused by the UK's frost damaged roads. Already nearly 2 million vehicles (8.4%) fail their MOT test in the UK each year due to windscreen damage.

Auto Windscreens advise motorists to check their windscreen before their vehicle's MOT and avoid the potential cost of a re-test and the vehicle being off the road. If there is damage of more than 10mm in the driver's line of sight or 40mm in the rest of the swept area, then the car could fail its MOT. The freezing weather has left the UK's roads exposed to a damaging condition known as 'freeze-thaw' resulting in an estimated 1.5 million potholes, twice as many as 2007 according to The Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA).

Nigel Davies, Auto Windscreens Sales and Marketing Director, said: "With the average MOT costing around £45, the last thing motorists want to hear is that it has failed on a minor point. Given the current road conditions the chances of windscreen damage is more likely. All too often people don't give their windscreen a second thought until it is too late. My advice is to check it now to avoid the costly inconvenience of the vehicle failing its MOT and subsequently being off the road until a windscreen replacement or repair can be arranged."



MOBILE PHONE USE AT THE WHEEL INCREASES

According to the Department for Transport, the proportion of car drivers using hand-held mobiles increased by 27% between September 2008 and November 2009. For van and lorry drivers the figure was up by 18%. Commenting on the findings, the director of the RAC Foundation Professor Stephen Glaister, said: "We know that drivers' reaction times slow by almost half when they are having a chat on their mobiles. This is even worse than texting whilst driving - bad enough in itself - which our research has shown reduces reactions by a third. It has been illegal to use a hand-held phone at the wheel since December 2003 and yet we have still seen this increase. It seems a small, but growing, minority of drivers choose to flout the law. Yet their actions can have tragic consequences. In 2008 the use of a mobile phone was a contributory factor in 16 fatal road accidents and many more where people were seriously injured."

"SHOWROOM TAX" FOR NEW VEHICLES

From April 2010, there will be different Vehicle Tax rates for new cars when they are first registered. These are known as 'first-year rates'. Standard rates of Vehicle Tax will also change in April 2010. Those people buying a new car will pay a different rate of Vehicle Tax for the first tax disc. From the second tax disc onwards they will then pay the standard rate. The showroom tax means significant increases for vehicles within Bands H-M – described as the more polluting cars by the Government – before reverting to the standard rate. As an example, a petrol or diesel Band M car bought new in May 2010 will cost £950 to tax for the first year, before reverting to £435 a year from May 2011. The showroom tax also means savings for cars in Band B-D, which will have zero VED as an incentive for drivers to go green at the point of purchase.