

We drive the new VW Polo

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VWSA sneaks their new Polo into SA amid a haze of sentimentality evoked by the Good bye Citi campaign. But does the all-new Polo have enough punch to lure Citi loyalists? Hailey Philander finds out

The Volkswagen Polo has dominated the small family hatchback market since its introduction (in Polo Classic sedan form) in 1996. Fast forward a few years and Volkswagen have high hopes for their third generation Polo which has just to reach South African shores.

At the vehicle's local introduction, a member of the Polo's core design team, Oona Scheepers, was on hand to add some gravitas to the proceedings. Scheepers, who originates from Prieska in the Northern Cape explained how the styling on the latest wave of Volkswagens is heavily influenced by Wolfsburg's older designs and current design chief Walter de Silva's express desire for simple, unfussed lines when designing vehicles.

Volkswagen's new family face has been applied to such great effect over a range of new vehicles, underscoring its adaptability as a key feature of new designs ranging from the likes of the Scirocco to the highly anticipated new Amarok bakkie.

Family DNA

In the metal, the new Polo is a dear to behold, particularly from the front where its linear grille and chiseled headlights dominate.





Styling at the rear of the Polo is less conventional, which may polarise general opinion with its strong geometric shapes (showing heavy detailing on the rear cluster) shadowing the car's more squared-off, structured look.

And as manufacturers are inclined to do with new generation models, Volkswagen has tossed in a few firsts, one of the most noticeable being a prominent shoulder line not seen on previous Polo incarnations. It adds an athletic quality to the profile of the newcomer, helped by short front and rear overhangs that, along with several other elements, conspire to make Polo appear less cuddly and more imposing...

In terms of its physical presence, the car is larger without appearing it. It looks positively tiny in the metal, but park it alongside its predecessor and its (comparative) chubbiness shows. It is longer by 54 mm, and the track is wider (about 30 mm front and rear) while the height has been dropped to lend Polo a lower centre of gravity.

On the road this - along with chassis improvements including a revised suspension - translates to a well balanced dynamic package, that may not match the new Ford Fiesta in terms of agility, but offers a surefooted confidence which is easily exploitable through faster corners.

Lean and clean

Volkswagen has employed new construction methods to make the 2010 Polo lighter than before, while the structural rigidity has also improved. Incidentally, this contributed to Polo receiving five stars in the Euro NCAP testing.





The Polo's electro-hydraulic power steering system offers a lighter feel than previous generations, offering greater ease of use at low speeds and when parking.

The Polo is a prudent purchase rather than one where the only criterion is rollicking good fun, and the rather sensible engine options are indicative of this. According to VWSA's Sales and Marketing Director, Mike Glendinning, one of the key objectives when designing the Polo was that its powerplants produce the lowest possible economy and emissions from the total package.

To this end, the local line-up at launch comprises 1.4- and 1.6-litre naturally aspirated petrol engines that have been carried over from the previous Polo and a revised 1.6-litre turbodiesel.

Engines are mated to five-speed manual gearboxes with the sole automatic being a six-speed Tiptronic for the range-topping petrol model.

Performance on all models is fair with the 63-kW 1.4 proving more than happy to waltz up and over the mountain passes presented to it on a launch route around Cape Town. Naturally, the free-revving 1.6 petrol unit was rather entertaining though the 77-kW diesel unit, now with common-rail injection, is a lusty performer, too.

Its "presence" was hardly heard in the cabin where the Polo's driver-oriented facia is characterised by large, uncluttered surfaces. New seats are not-too-shallow and rather comfortable.

Equipment

Two specification grades - Trendline and Comfortline - are offered with an impressive array of "standard" equipment on the base model.

Trendline models come standard with ABS and EBD, driver and passenger front, head and thorax airbags, height adjustable driver's seat, Isofix anchors on the rear bench, power windows up front, a steering column adjustable for rake and reach, and power steering.

Comfortline models add items such as fog lamps, alloy wheels, multifunction leather steering wheel, power wing mirrors, power windows all round and climate control.

The turbodiesel model is the only to receive ESP as standard, thanks to its 250 Nm of torque running to the front wheels. The stability programme is an option on certain lesser models. Other options include rear park distance control, a radio/CD/MP3 compatible audio system allowing auxiliary sources, and cruise control.

These little cars are being churned out of Uitenhage at a heady pace (South Africa is, after all, the sole source of five-door models for right hand drive markets), but quality on the launch units seemed fair.

VERDICT

It's likely that Ford will be perturbed by how much attention the Polo diverts from their very stylish, and very capable, Fiesta. Especially since the introductions of Cross Polo, Polo GTI, Polo Classic and perhaps even three-door derivatives are expected to be rolled out from the middle of this year.



All in all, South Africa's penchant for the German brand is likely to ensure that the residual values of the Polo remain a stronger selling point of the VW over its rivals and for now marginally justifies its higher price tag.

In South Africa, new Polo comes standard with a three-year/120 000 km warranty. A five-year/60 000 km service plan is optional, as is an Automotion Maintenance Plan over the same period for R6 856 and R9 141, respectively.

Prices:

- 1.4 Trendline - R144 900
- 1.4 Comfortline - R161 900
- 1.6 Trendline - R166 900
- 1.6 Comfortline - R183 900
- 1.6 Comfortline Tiptronic - R197 900
- 1.6 TDI Comfortline - R209 900



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