

VW Polo 1.3 GT Hatchback



VW'S 'NEW' POLO IS, IN REALITY, A thoroughly facelifted version of the existing model rather than the long-awaited, brand-new one that some had expected.

Nevertheless, sleeker, more-rounded lines, revised plastic bumpers, square headlamps and a redesigned fascia, freshen up VW's long-running supermini. There's further good news under the bonnet because the reworked (torque-optimised) engines all have fuel injection and three-way regulated exhaust catalysts (which meet the stringent US '83 emissions requirements). What's more, VW has – at long last – tried to do something about the Polo's much-criticised heavy brakes, by adding a servo to all models.

Among the 10-model line-up, the addition of multi-point fuel injection to the familiar 1272cc engine provides increased power for a new 1.3-litre 75bhp variant – the 1.3GT. Like the three models below it, this, too, is available in two different versions – as either the pretty looking three-door Coupé, or (as tested) a 'mini estate' three-door Hatchback.

There's no longer a hefty price premium on the

Coupé, either (all models are priced identically to the equivalent Hatch), and if the GT's 75bhp and *de rigueur* red bumper inserts and grille badge aren't loud enough, there's a 112bhp G40 Coupé just around the corner.

At the wheel

From earlier experience of the new models, we knew that the more you pay for your Polo, the more the noise and harshness levels increase.

The GT's vigorous engine might boast good mid-range pull and prove to be a willing enough little revver, but too much acoustic evidence of its activity finds its way through to the cabin. The appropriately 'short' gearing complements the engine's power characteristics nicely, but it certainly doesn't aid cruising refinement. This is marred by a boomy resonance at around 4000rpm – just what you don't want when motorway cruising.

Alas, the Polo GT's chassis is something of a let-down for the keener driver, too. Coming straight from Rover's delightful little Metro GTi, we were,

admittedly, rather spoilt, but the Polo's less-than-razor-sharp handling, turbulent reactions to road faults and 'treacly', lifeless steering simply aren't in the Metro's class.

There's reasonable grip from the GT's wider 155/70 tyres and, at the limit, there are no nasty tail-out, opposite-lock histrionics in store for the unwary. Nevertheless, the Polo GT fails to fulfill the promises made by its GT badges.

On the plus side, the GT proves to be far from thirsty (cat or not), thanks no doubt to its bantam-like kerbweight and 10 per cent more aerodynamic lines: we recorded a better-than-average 42¹/₂mpg overall in our comprehensive tests.

The GT's sports front seats (available as a £200 option on CL versions, incidentally) provide useful support and location and remain comfortable on long runs. As well as a chunky sports steering wheel and pint-sized tachometer, the GT also comes with a tilt-cum-height adjuster for the driver's seat. For some obscure reason, the seat provides unusually generous forward travel – a point of particular interest to really short drivers.

Now that they are servo-assisted (yes, after all these years!), the Polo GT's disc/drum brakes can be almost too much of a good thing in an emergency. However, despite the reasonably respectable figures we recorded at the test track, our car's brakes failed to inspire complete confidence. They suffered from disturbingly long pedal travel before they did much – despite the servo and master cylinder assembly being moved over for right-hand drive – and also produced an annoying steering shimmy under light braking on turns. In the past, Polo brakes needed a long and firm push, now they just need a long prod – so at least some progress has been made.

Space and comfort

Although the new facia, full-height door trims and smart upholstery should brighten the interior, VW's insistence on all-black cabins for its sporty models rather negates the effect in the GT. Our jet-black test car was even blacker inside – carpets, headlining, the lot – so creating anything but the bright, airy and inviting impression that might otherwise have been provided. The cheaper Fox models may be a little too jazzy for some tastes, but they certainly look a good deal more friendly inside.

Trimmed in an attractive check (though still dark grey) cloth upholstery, the Polo GT could almost pass for a Scirocco at a quick glance inside. The back seat looks as though it might be just as cramped as the Scirocco's, too, although once passengers are installed in the Polo, their kneeroom is actually better than in either the Metro or the Nova.

We thought our test car was quite well equipped: a steel sunroof, split-folding back seats, heat-insulating green-tinted glass, twin roofrack rails, driver's seat-height/tilt adjustment and remote-controlled door mirrors – until the options list and our calculator

revealed that only the last two come as standard; the four extras add a tidy £900 (and 73p) to the price! Alloy wheels, headlamp washers and heated washer jets? 'Certainly sir, that'll be another £360 + £172 + £22.50: £554.50 in all.'

On a more positive note, the Hatchback not only offers more luggage space than the Coupé (helpful for bulky or taller loads), but its longer roofline means that there's an extra inch or two of headroom at the back.

We also like the split-folding back seat's two-stage backrest angle adjustment, which provides a touch more load space – at the expense of a more upright backrest. But on what is already the dearest Polo you can buy, does Wolfsburg seriously expect punters to stump up a further £185 for them? Come off it, VW! And, to add insult to injury, there's not even a load-space lamp to light your way into the boot at night. Oh, and central locking isn't available, either – not even as an option.

The new rotary heating and ventilation controls look neater and ought to be much easier in use, but not only does the heater use the older, less-responsive water valve to regulate the warmth, there was so much lost motion on our test car's heat dial that it often took several minutes of irritating fiddling to obtain a comfortable setting.

Although there are only two (outboard) facia vents – which can oblige with cool air whatever the heater setting – these work very well. The centre console incorporates two small outlets at floor level, too, directing some warmth to the rear footwells.

VERDICT

Anyone expecting something really new of the latest Polos is going to be disappointed. What's on offer is a well-executed revamp of a soundly made, competent, though ultimately not very exciting, supermini – and one that's still two doors short compared with most rivals.

As for the GT, the closer you look into it the less convincing it seems. It has its strengths: lively performance, good economy, decent seats and a 'clean' exhaust – but these are outweighed by a stingy equipment list (unless you're prepared to add quite a bit to the showroom price), poor refinement, that irksome engine boom and driver appeal that falls well short of what's expected from something wearing a GT badge.

When we tested the Polo Fox, we reckoned that the more you spend on a Polo the poorer the levels of ride and noise control become, and the more the items that aren't new become apparent. Sadly, the Polo GT only reinforces this view. It's difficult to put a price on that legendary VW build quality, although in this case the men in grey suits at Milton Keynes have certainly had a good stab at it.

The Polo deserves its loyal supporters, but more so lower down the range, because this one isn't really GT material. Perhaps the G40 will be.

PERFORMANCE

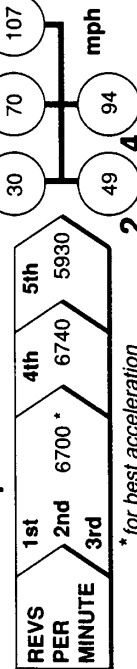
Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	3.4	0-60mph	10.5	1/4 mile	17.7
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mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.9	4.2	7.1	10.9
IN 5TH GEAR		5.2	10.7	16.5	23.1
IN 4TH GEAR		3.7	7.3	11.3	16.0

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		10.7/7.5	11.3/7.6	12.4/8.7	

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION

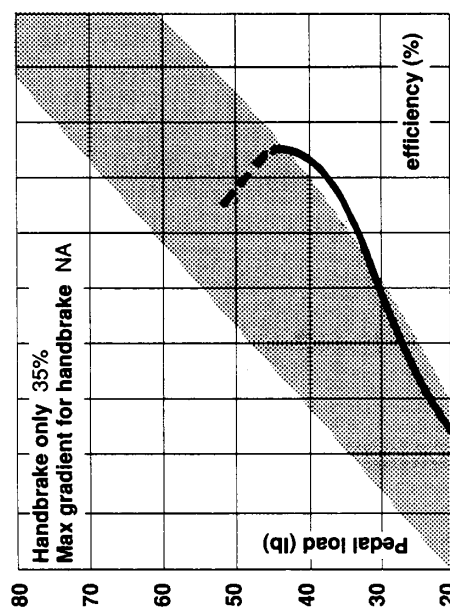
Fuel grade for tests: 95 octane, unleaded

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	33 1/2
Short journeys in the suburbs	36 1/2
Motorway - 70mph cruising	41
Brisk driving, mixed roads	43 1/2
Gentle driving - rural roads	50
Typical mpg overall	42 1/2
Realistic tank range*	39 litres/360 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

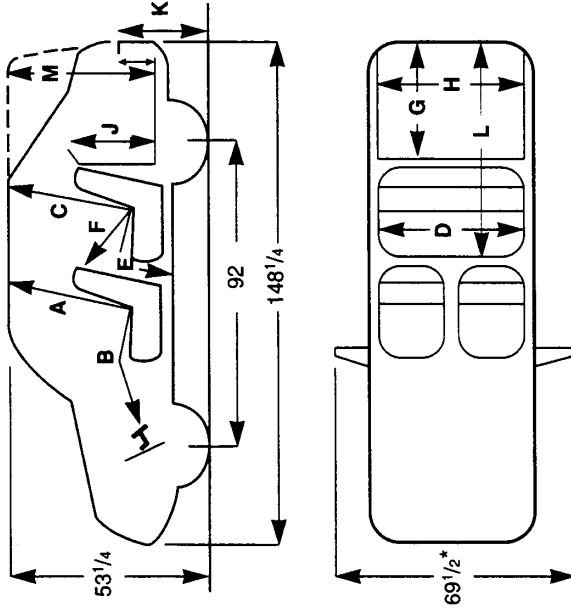
At start of test	32
After constant use	35
After severe use	45
After watersplash	-
Number of stops to recover	-

Safety check list

Steering	true 'feel' of the road?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brakes	powerful?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	sensible effort?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	fade resistant?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Seatbelts	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	rears - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head restraints	convenient?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	front - effective?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interior	rear - effective?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	thoroughly padded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fuel	shielded filler?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	protected tank?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* 61 3/4 with mirrors folded

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

1713

Inside (inches)

A Front headroom

35-37

B Front legroom (min - max)

30-41

C Rear headroom

36 1/2

D Back seat width (between armrests)

49 1/4

E Typical rear * legroom

35 3/4-50

F Typical rear * kneeroom

25

G Load length

17

H Load floor width (min - max)

7/25 1/4

J Load height

46 1/2

K Sill height (inner/outer)

32

L Load length

27

M Load height (to tailgate hinge)

32

* 'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel overall (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
VW Polo 1.3GT Hatchback (3 door)	1272/74	107	10.9	23.1/16.0	42½	94/45	41	37½/27	3.6/31	148¼
Fiat Uno 70SX ie (5 door)	1372/72	105	12.0	25.7/20.0	39½	94/55	40	39½/27½	4.0/31½	145¼
Peugeot 205 1.4XS (3 door)	1360/85	106	10.2	19.3/14.2	39	94/55	40¼	37/27¼	3.8/33¼	146
Rover Metro 1.4SL Cat (3 door)	1396/76	102	12.6	25.8/18.6	40	87/50	41	37¼/24½	3.6/32	138¾
Rover Metro 1.4GTi 16v (3 door)	1396/94	110	10.4	24.5/16.9	41	91/55	41½	37½/25½	3.4/35	138¾
Vauxhall Nova 1.4i Cat Merit (3 door)	1389/60	97	14.4	35.2/23.0	44½	104/75	40½	37½/25¾	3.8/31	143¾



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 75.0mm bore x 72.0mm stroke = 1272cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head: 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 10.0:1

Valve gear single belt-driven overhead camshaft actuating two valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system VW Digifant multi-point fuel injection, three-way catalyst and Lambda sensor. 42-litre (9.2-gallon) tank; no low-level warning lamp. Fuel required: 95 octane minimum, unleaded only

Ignition system fully programmed electronic (integrated with fuel injection) via coil and distributor

Maximum power (DIN-net) 74bhp at 5900rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 73 lb ft at 3200-4000rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 7.5in diaphragm spring, dry plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 25 lb/5½in

Gearbox 5 speed (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.45, second 2.09, third 1.47, fourth 1.10, fifth 0.85 and reverse 3.38:1

Final drive 4.06:1, to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 18.04 in top, 13.94 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3880 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs and an anti-roll bar.

Rear: torsion beam axle, trailing arms, coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round

Steering non-assisted rack and pinion with 3.6 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 31ft between kerbs, with 53ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 4½J steel with 155/70R13 75T tyres (Michelin MXL on test car)

Brakes 9.4in plain discs front, 7.6in drums rear with vacuum servo