

Skoda Fabia

Featured model: 1.4 Comfort (68bhp)



THIS IS A BRAND NEW MODEL that's ahead of its time. Now who would have thought 10 years ago that such an assertion could be ascribed to a Skoda? It's true, however, because VW has chosen to lead with this Skoda version of the Group's new supermini and thereby smooth any rough edges before it's metamorphosed into the next Polo a couple of years hence.

There are some irritations, but of a minor nature and they can be easily sorted out, if there's the will. The right-first-time major attributes – mechanical refinement, good handling, generous interior space and integrity of build – are all apparent. These combine to edge the Fabia ahead of most established competition, so the low price of the 1.4 Classic makes a compelling case for buyers writing their own cheque.

The 100bhp version is £2800 dearer, but it delivers more than enough get-up-and-go to see off most obvious rivals of similar price. While no ball of fire, this cheaper 68bhp version (derived from the Felicia) proves delightfully free-revving, yet is quieter and flexible, too, whereas the more accelerative VW unit sounds a shade more gruff.

The steering (using electric power assistance) is precise but very light, the cornering is agile and the ride firm but free from serious jolts; there's a hint of directional waywardness at times, however.

The Fabia is larger and longer than most current superminis. In fact, only the Rover 25 matches its external size, and only the

Felicia can match its interior accommodation for both passengers and luggage. With so many new mini-cars appearing of late (Lupo/Arosa, for example) growing a bit makes sense.

Our Comfort version was generously equipped, with several new convenience features, such as chilled facia compartments and door mirrors with "his-and-her" adjustment in tandem. There's also Skoda's three-year/ 48,000-mile free servicing in the list price, plus a warranty, particularly against rust, that makes Ford and Vauxhall look like Scrooge.



VERDICT

At one time, you lived with the shortcomings of a Skoda because it was fundamentally sound and very much cheaper to buy. The Fabia 1.4 Classic is still excellent value, but now there's nothing significant to apologise for.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆○○○
Fuel economy	☆☆☆☆○
Controls/displays	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1397cc 4 cylinder petrol, 68bhp at 5000rpm, 88 lb ft at 2500rpm. Chain-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive. 21.1 mph per 1000rpm in 5th, 16.4 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts, coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs

steering electro-hydraulic PAS - 2.8 turns lock-to-lock: 10.25m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.8m for one turn of wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear with ABS option (standard on 100bhp Comfort)

wheels/tyres 6in steel with 185/60R14T standard (alloy wheel option on test car). Full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

wipers park neatly out of sight
fine direction control for heat/vent
rear wipers automatically in reverse
neat pockets on sides of seats

some minor controls/tell-tales obscure
sun visors don't come low enough
inadequate front seat spinal support
accelerator too light/too slow to respond

THE 3-SERIES RANGE

body supermini 5 door - estate later
trim levels Classic, Comfort, Elegance
engines 3 petrol 1.0/50bhp, 1.4/68bhp, 1.4/100bhp. 2 diesel 1.9SDi/64bhp, 1.9 TDi/100bhp. More later
drive front via 5-speed manual - 4 speed auto with torque converter later (1.4/75bhp)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★☆☆○

Favorit/Felicia-based old-timer may not head this traffic, but it's quiet and flexible; hard to believe it's a revamped Favorit engine

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	NA	10.0	15.3		
30-50mph	5.6	9.7	15.0		
40-60mph	7.3	10.3	14.6		
50-70mph	9.7	11.8	16.8		
30-70mph	15.3	21.5	31.8		
max speed in each gear (*using 5500rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	25½	45	67	90	99

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆○

A worthy successor to Felicia (makes most rivals look cramped), plus good boot space and rear cushion easily removed. "Quick", light steering for parking

in centimetres (5-door hatch)		inside († without sunroof)	
outside		front - legroom	83-108
length	396	- headroom	94-102†
width - inc mirrors	194	rear - typical leg/	
- mirrors folded	170	kneeroom	100/72
height	145	- headroom	93
load sill	17/63	- hiproom	123-126
steering		load space (litres/cu ft)	
turns lock-to-lock	2.8	(all seats in use)	
turning circle (metres)	10.25	load length	59/123
easy to park/garage?	★★★☆☆	full length to fascia	220
		load width	96-99
		load height (to shelf)	55
		(to top of aperture)	84

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★☆☆○

Good quality fascia but seat support inferior to Felicia's and accelerator action needs a rethink. Clever detailing for wipers, mirrors and handbrake



SAFETY ★★☆☆○

Twin airbags, fuel anti-spillage measures plus advanced impact-resistant design promote Fabia's safety credentials. Excellent brakes, with ABS option

braking	pedal feel	in emergency	handbrake	dry road stopping distance	
	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	★★★☆☆	from 50mph	(with ABS option)
				pedal load	distance
				10kg	32½
				17kg	24½ best stop
				+4kg ie 31kg	26m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS - not tested

front impact	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	pedestrian rating	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
overall	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	side impact	

SECURITY FEATURES

central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	○	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	○	luggage security	★★★☆☆
deadlocks	✓		
✓ standard	○ factory option	✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★☆☆○

This 68bhp version's steering almost too light - VW-engined car better; an eager bend-swinger, but not quite in Fiesta/Seicento league



COMFORT ★★☆☆○

Better ride than Polo's, but still joggles when lightly laden; some neat convenience features, eg chilled fascia cubbies

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆○

Easy filler but economy nothing special at this performance level; good range

type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	26
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	33½
motorway (70mph cruising)	38
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	41
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	49½
typical mpg overall	40
realistic tank range	42 litres/370 miles
official combined figure	39.2/mpg
CO ₂ emissions 173 g/km	car tax band C

HOW THE FABIA COMPARES

	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes best stop (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
SKODA FABIA 1.4	4/1397/68	3310	15.3	31.8/21.5	40	24½/27*	108	100/72	2.8/10.25	396
Ford Fiesta 1.25	4/1242/75	3640	12.4	28.1/18.5	42	28/16	108	92/66	2.8/10.1	383
Peugeot 206 1.4	4/1360/75	3330	12.7	30.3/20.2	43	25/13*	108	94/66	3.3/10.1	384
Rover 25 1.4S	4/1396/103	3360	11.4	32.5/22.0	38	28/14	107	97/70	3.0/10.3	399
Fiat Punto 1.2 16v (5dr) †	4/1242/80	3210	11.7	29.7/20.2	41	27/12	108	96/67	2.8/10.8	384
Toyota Yaris 1.0	4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362

† performance and economy figures for 1997-99 version * with ABS (p) all power assisted