

BOOT CHAMP

Volkswagen Jetta 1.6 TDI BlueMotion Technology SE

Price: £19,530 Engine: 1.6-litre 4cyl, 104bhp
0-60mph: 12.5 secs Econ on test: 49.7mpg
Claimed CO₂: 109g/km Annual road tax: £20
Why? Smart-looking four-door Jetta is clean and fuel efficient. Is that enough to tempt buyers away from hatchbacks?

Peugeot 508 e-HDi Active

Price: £20,750 Engine: 1.6-litre 4cyl, 112bhp
0-60mph: 12.4 secs Econ on test: 44.2mpg
Claimed CO₂: 109g/km Annual road tax: £20
Why? New saloon brings an automated box, advanced stop-start technology and fuel-sipping economy to the large family car class.

Skoda Octavia 1.6 TDI GreenLine II

Price: £17,875 Engine: 1.6-litre 4cyl, 104bhp
0-60mph: 11.2 secs Econ on test: 43.2mpg
Claimed CO₂: 99g/km Annual road tax: £0
Why? It uses the same 1.6-litre TDI as the VW, yet the GreenLine II is even cleaner than its cousin, and has a practical hatch body.

Does VW's new Golf-based Jetta saloon make sense for family buyers? In its first test, we pitch it against Skoda's Octavia hatchback and the four-door Peugeot 508 to find out

▶ WE love hatchbacks in the UK, so it's easy to overlook the Volkswagen Jetta. The saloon has always been a bit-part player in the family car market, yet that could all be about to change.

Bosch claims there's more to the all-new sixth-generation model than meets the eye, but is it simply a Golf with a boot or a genuine junior Passat? It clearly

has compact executive ambitions, as the latest model is bigger and sharper looking than before. Yet its longer wheelbase also promises family friendly proportions inside. So is the Jetta going to appear on the radar of private and business buyers?

To find out, we've assembled a pair of tough rivals. First up is the Skoda Octavia. The hatchback shares many components

with the VW, provides loads of space for your money and, in GreenLine II guise, undercuts the CO₂ emissions of our Jetta 1.6 TDI BlueMotion Technology test car.

If saloons are your thing, the new Peugeot 508 demands serious attention. It comes with a high-quality cabin, and the e-HDi model is designed to tempt business users with its promise of low emissions.



"Latest Jetta clearly has compact executive ambitions, as it's bigger and sharper-looking than before"



STYLING

★★★★★

BIGGER and better looking than its predecessor, the Jetta is now more of a standalone saloon than an elongated Golf. SE models get 16-inch alloys, but only the Sport has a chrome window surround.

INTERIOR

★★★★★

WITH a business-like cabin derived from the Golf, new car scores highly for driver comfort. Rear legroom is superb and the 510-litre boot is massive. And from SE trim upwards, a 60:40 split-fold rear seat is standard, too.

DRIVING

★★★★★

DECENT body control, linear steering and a composed ride make the VW feel like the class-leading Golf. Tauter responses than the Skoda and a better ride than the 508 hand it the advantage.

COSTS

★★★★★

THE Jetta is cheaper than the 508 and better equipped than the Octavia. Running costs should be reasonable, too. Residuals of 38.6 per cent are the strongest here, and VW offers an attractive fixed-price servicing deal.

GREEN

★★★★★

LONG gearing, smooth stop-start and BlueMotion tech help trim the 1.6-litre Jetta's emissions to only 109g/km. However, unlike the Skoda it doesn't dip below the magic sub-100g/km mark. But we averaged 49.7mpg during our time with the Volkswagen.

Jetta is the longer car, but offers similar performance to VW Group cousin on road



VOLKSWAGEN JETTA VS SKODA OCTAVIA

STYLING

★★★★

MID-life facelift brought reworked headlamps to the Octavia. Its smooth panels are neat and tidy, but it doesn't look as upmarket as the Jetta. GreenLine II gets 15-inch wheels and eco-friendly badging.

INTERIOR

★★★★

AS comfortable and well built as its VW rival, the Octavia's no-frills layout works well – but kit count is low. Legroom in the back is tighter than in the Jetta, although overall comfort is hard to fault and the rear hatch lifts to reveal an enormous load area.

DRIVING

★★★★

ECO-tuned Octavia strikes a good balance between ride comfort and handling. The VW is a fraction sharper to drive, but the Skoda is composed in corners and refined at motorway speeds.

COSTS

★★★★

CHEAPER and cleaner than the Jetta, the Octavia is a great ownership proposition – particularly as residuals are healthy. Kit includes cruise control and manual air-con, but GreenLine II has a limited range of options.

GREEN

★★★★★

THE green Skoda emits only 99g/km of CO₂. This qualifies it for a free tax disc and the lowest company car tax band. It's also exempt from London's £10 Congestion Charge.

They share the same engine, but is saloon or hatch the wiser buy here?

IS it time for the Jetta to become a friend of the family? With a larger cabin than ever and a big boot the VW makes plenty of sense, but the Skoda Octavia will be no pushover in the race for honours here.

The latter follows the Czech firm's tried-and-tested approach of offering cabin space to rival cars from the class above at affordable prices. This GreenLine II version is powered by the same 1.6-litre TDI engine as our Jetta and, with related underpinnings, the pair have plenty in common.

The VW is the longer of the two. However, thanks to its lengthy wheelbase, it is well proportioned and has the kind of upmarket edge that was missing from its

predecessors. To our eyes, it's more like a miniature Audi A4 than a Golf with a boot.

In contrast, the Skoda is looking dated and lacks the definition of the Jetta's sharp shoulder line and solid wheelarches. Parked alongside the VW, the Octavia appears a touch bloated. Both models feature colour-coded door mirrors and bumpers, and there's nothing to split them when it comes to shut lines and perceived quality on the outside.

That theme continues inside, although there are some key differences. The most obvious is at the rear, where the four-door Jetta trails the Octavia hatch for outright versatility. In terms of pure space, there's not much in it. The Jetta's large rump hides a 510-litre boot (a useful 160 litres bigger than a Golf's), but the narrow opening is what sets it apart here.

In SE trim you get 60:40 split-folding rear seats, and with these down, the maximum load length is 20cm greater than the Octavia's. However, ultimate functionality is limited by the 50cm height restriction between rear screen and boot floor. Clearly this isn't an issue in the Skoda, as its vast



Both boots are spacious, but the Skoda hatch is more versatile than restricted Jetta opening

tailgate provides unhindered access to the 585-litre load area. Fold the seats and you get a huge 1,350-litre capacity to play with.

Sit in the cabin, though, and the advantage swings back to the Jetta. Previous versions of the saloon shared the Golf's wheelbase, but the latest car has an extra 76mm between the axles, meaning rear legroom is excellent. In the Skoda, your knees are a couple of inches



Skoda handles impressively, while the Jetta's Golf roots shine through in corners

closer to the front seatbacks than in the VW. Up front, both cars have a similarly ergonomic and easy-to-live-with dash layout. They share much of their switchgear and this, allied to the fact they both provide a wide range of seat adjustment, means they feel very similar from behind the wheel.

There's barely any difference in build quality, but close examination reveals a few issues with the fit and finish of the Mexican-built Jetta. For instance, the trim joints on the door panels lack the precision we've come to expect from the brand, and you don't get the same flock-lined door bins that feature on the Golf.

On the road, it will feel reassuringly familiar to anyone who drives VW's current hatch. Its linear steering, plentiful grip and tidy body control deliver the same handling composure as its big-selling stablemate.

Although the entry-level 1.6 TDI BlueMotion Technology engine clatters a little at low revs, it improves on the move and refinement at speed is good. Stop-start and brake regeneration help deliver fuel-sipping thirst of only 49.7mpg and a CO₂ output of only 109g/km.

The Octavia uses the same stop-start unit, but adds to the mix an aero-optimised body and 15mm

lower ride height. As a result, it trumps the Jetta on paper, dipping below the magic 100g/km mark. This is impressive when you consider how closely matched the cars are in terms of performance and refinement – the Skoda was actually faster than the VW in our sprint from 0-60mph.

The Octavia is good to drive, too. There is a fraction more body roll in corners, but grip levels are consistent and all the controls are well weighted. Ride comfort and refinement are also closely contested, so there's nothing to choose between our duo as long-haul companions. A higher equipment count gives the Jetta the edge in this respect.

To compensate, the Skoda is £1,655 cheaper than its rival, although it managed only 43.2mpg during our test, so picking a winner here isn't going to be easy.



From behind the wheel, the Octavia disappoints with equipment tally



Functional and well laid-out dash shares a lot of switchgear with Skoda