



Volkswagen Golf

Anchor point

Review | Volkswagen regards itself as the one and only brand. The Golf is considered to be the de facto car. There's a reason for this: Volkswagen sells more cars than any other brand. Also, the Golf is the best selling model and therefore the standard. Now Volkswagen introduces the Golf Mk 7 and just because of its heritage there's no doubt it will be another success. The question is: will the new Golf only be the standard because of its sales figures or also because of its qualities?

Its wholesome, predictable character is what made the Golf a hit from the very first start in 1974. Because of this it's understandable why the designers did not take any risk with the looks of the new Golf. Even with a new Golf the customer has to know what he/she is going to get beforehand.

Although the Golf 7 has been designed from scratch, its family resemblance is so strong that the differences between the old model only show when both are parked side by side. The main improvement is that the seventh Golf has a more aggressive look than its predecessor.



To offer more cabin space the Golf VII is longer. The wheelbase has increased by 26 mm and the front wheels have been moved forward. At the same time the car has been lowered to improve aerodynamics and improve fuel consumption. Recently Volkswagen gained a lot of experience with composite materials, which make a car both stronger (read: safer) and lighter. Compared to the previous Golf the new generation is about 100 kg lighter.

This new way of building has another advantage: the Volkswagen group uses a new platform that is easier to reuse. At this moment the Golf estate is still based on the Golf V, while the convertible shares its base with the Golf VI. Thanks to the new platform, new versions should be easier to develop, so all body styles benefit from new technologies.

Trim level

The designers didn't take any chances with the cabin either. The difference is in the details. For example, the seating position has been altered and the dashboard has been wrapped around the driver just a tad more. This may seem like a minor detail, but the test driver rarely felt at home as quickly as in the Golf Mark 7!



The space both in the front and back is ample. Adults have enough head and legroom on the back seat. The back seat has a more pronounced shape, making it more pleasant to travel long distances in the back. The boot has hardly grown at all (from 350 to 380 litres), but has become easier to access thanks to a wider tailgate and a lower threshold.

Optionally the Golf VII can be fitted with seats that have been developed in cooperation with the German Campaign for Healthier Backs. Although these seats certainly are comfortable, the difference against the standard chairs isn't so big that it makes up for the extra cost. Regrettably, the front seat headrests cannot be adjusted enough to add to safety. Oddly

enough the back headrests can be adjusted much further.



A large display dominates the dashboard, even on the base level of the Golf VII. The user interface resembles that of a mobile phone. Of course, the audio and communication system can be integrated with a phone or MP3 player. To make the screen easier to read VW implemented a "proximity sensor". This means that menus only appear just before the hand actually touches the screen.

Another invisible, yet valuable, development is in the safety systems. Optionally the Golf will brake automatically for obstacles. In case an accident does happen, the new Golf will now apply the brakes to prevent a second accident.

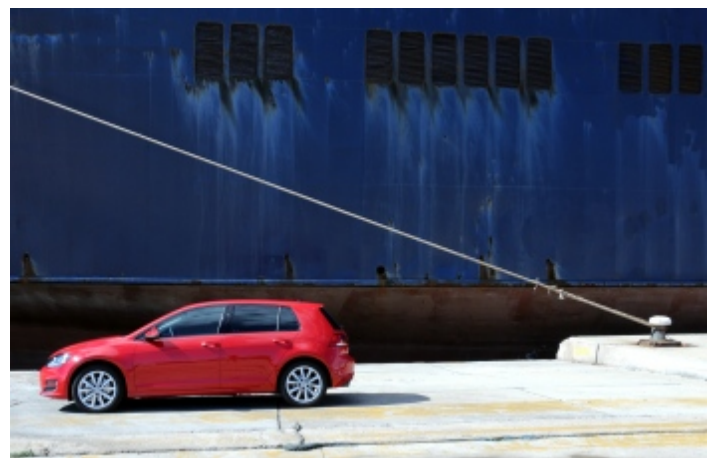
Handling

To improve handling every Golf 7 is fitted with "XDS". This feature used to be reserved just for the Golf GTI. It distributes the torque over the left and right front wheels depending on the situation. This prevents understeer (sliding forward while steering) and improves the feeling in the steering wheel.

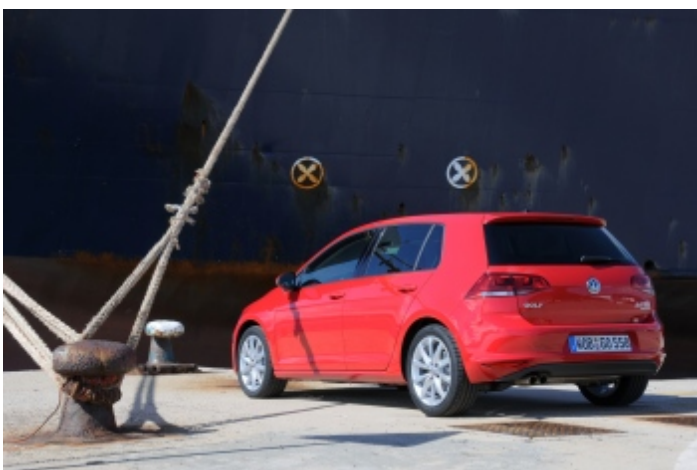


If there's one thing that makes the Golf deserve the title "standard" it is roadholding. The Golf 7 grips like a sports car, but without being as entertaining or tiresome. Even when trying to force the car into a spin, the Golf reacts safely and predictably. Setting off at full throttle in a corner on a wet road is no problem.

During a brake test the Golf 7 also showed sports car qualities. From 62 mph the Golf stops in a straight line, within a minimum distance and without any drama.



A rudimentary way to feel the effect of XDS is first to corner while idling and then take the same corner again at the same speed with just a little throttle.



The more expensive versions can vary their character depending on the driver's mood. With a touch of a button the response of the suspension, steering and throttle can be adjusted. While the difference between these settings is evident, the standard suspension is already so good that it's hardly ever necessary to choose an "extreme" option like "sports" or "comfort".

Despite Volkswagen's obsession to reduce weight, sound insulation is excellent. During the various test drives noise from the wind was simply absent. Depending on the road surface the tyres can be heard slightly or not at all. The engine noise is only apparent when the car comes to a complete stop and the stop/start mechanism fails to do its job.

Diesel

Depending on the engine power the Golf 7 comes either with standard or sports suspension. During the test drive only cars with strong engines were available, meaning only the "strong" suspension has been tried.

First the "2.0 TDI" was tested. It excelled in delivering lots of torque at very low revs. This engine performs with so much ease that the driver cannot help but feel

superior. At the same time the slightest touch on the accelerator results in instant acceleration.



This means the Golf is just as suitable for sporty driving as for a more relaxed driving style. In the first case the 2.0 TDI uses about 6.1 litres of diesel per 100 km (46 mpg). A calmer drive cost 4.8 litres per 100 km (58 mpg).

Petrol

Of all brands the Volkswagen "TSI" engines offer the best combination of high power and low fuel consumption; not just in theory but also in daily life. Recently the TSI engines have had some bad press for being unreliable. A Volkswagen spokesman assured that the faulty part is no longer used in the new generation of TSI engines.

The best combination of spritely performance and excellent fuel efficiency is offered by the 1.4 litre TSI engine with "cylinder on demand". When less power is required, two of the four cylinders are shut down to save fuel. This happens automatically and unnoticeably; neither performance nor comfort are affected.



Just like the diesel engine, the TSI delivers its power from very low engine speeds. For example, at 1,500 rpm the shift indicator already suggests to select a higher gear! When doing so, performance is minimal, but the car doesn't decelerate and the engine doesn't protest.

On exactly the same route as driven with the Golf diesel, the petrol version used only marginally more fuel: 5.8 litres per 100 km (49 mpg).

Conclusion

The Volkswagen Golf VII will be a big hit, that's for sure. Just its name and reputation are enough to make it top the charts. It also means the Golf 7 will be the standard yet again. However, that is as honourable as stating that bread is the breakfast and coffee is the drink.

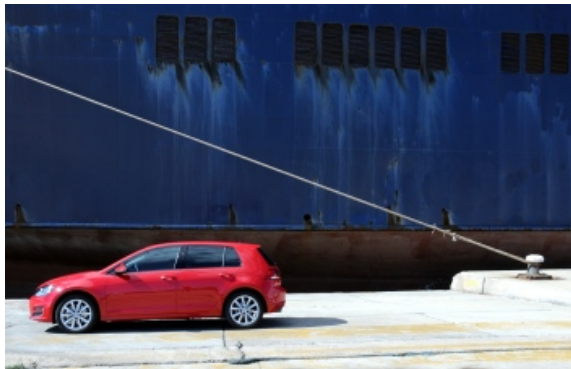
Luckily the Golf 7 has more qualities to offer. The most important of which is the clever way that the cabin space had increased while weight has been reduced. Its lower weight doesn't just benefit performance, it also does wonders for fuel economy. Handling has been greatly improved thanks to "XDS". All engines deliver fair performance, while still being frugal.

While the Golf VII isn't revolutionary or innovative, it has been improved in every conceivable way. That makes the seventh Golf already a familiar car and therefore the standard choice. ■

Specifications

Volkswagen Golf 2.0 TDI SE

Size and weight



Length x width x height	426 x 179 x 145 cm
Wheelbase	264 cm
Kerb weight	1.354 kg
Trailer	670 kg
Trailer - braked	1.600 kg
Fuel capacity	50 l
Luggage space	380/1270 l
Tyre size	205/55R16

Engine and performance



Capacity	1968 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	150 PS @ 3500 rpm
Max torque	320 Nm @ 1750 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	8.6 secs
Top speed	216 km/h
Average mileage	4.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	5 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	3.3 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	106 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 22,225
Price base model	Â£ 16,495