



Skoda Octavia Scout

Scouting off-road

Car review | When does an estate stop being an estate and when does an SUV start to be an SUV? Skoda is pushing these limits with its brand new Octavia Scout. This unique estate has extra bumpers, raised suspension and four-wheel drive. The initial meeting was a great pleasure...

The Skoda Octavia Combi was already available with four-wheel drive; however the Scout has much more to offer. It all starts with that expected anticipation of the Scout's uniform. Impact strips run along the car; protection plates run under the car. Wide-beam lights are mounted in the bumpers. The picture is complete with double exhaust and 17 inch alloys which were specially designed for this Scout.

The Octavia Scout is unmistakably rougher and sturdier than the ordinary Octavia. Yet, at the same time the Scout doesn't have the pomposity of an off-road vehicle. Other road users admire it with interest rather than the usual irritation reserved for the space-consuming, petrol-guzzling SUVs.



Interior

The Scout's interior has taken on board its adventurous character. Pedals with rubber grooves aren't just for the show of it; the grooves give an absolutely necessary extra grip to slippery footwear. Above the dashboard compartment, there is a large hand grip, to which the front passenger can cling

when the driver is having a little bit of fun. Even during the test drive this handy piece of equipment proved to be more than just for show.

The Octavia Scout is meant as a clever alternative to the SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) or off-road vehicle. However SUVs are bought for more than just their sturdy appearance. By definition SUVs are large and thus roomy. Consequently the Octavia estate is only available as a "Scout", and not as a saloon. The Octavia estate is of middling size with a maximum of 580 litres luggage space. Of course the Scout as always is prepared for everything and is as standard equipped with roof rails for either a ski box or bicycle carrier.



In the front, the Octavia Scout has not only the surprising space of an off-road vehicle, but also more than sufficient head and legroom. This unfortunately at the cost of legroom in the rear. When the driver's seat is in the furthest position - which is fortunately designed for drivers over 6'8" - there is almost no legroom left in the rear.

The design of the interior is typical Skoda with many of its components having clearly been borrowed from its parent company, Volkswagen. The Octavia does have a slightly less clinical feeling. Although it isn't easy to substantiate, not only this test driver but also all its passengers felt particularly comfortable in the Scout. The car bestows a remarkably trusted and pleasant feeling.

Turin

The final destination for this test drive is the Italian city of Turin; the scene of the Winter Olympic Games in 2006. On the motorway, the Scout behaves just like an ordinary Octavia. The wheelbase is a couple of centimetres shorter than that of the majority of competitors. Consequently, the Octavia is a little bit less gentle over the road. Apart from that there is little else to mention of its driving characteristics.



Over long distances, the Scout does offer ample comfort. Its performance is good in spite of the raised suspension. In comparison with an average SUV, the road handling can be considered exceptionally good.

Engine

The Scout is available with petrol and diesel engines. The technical specifications barely differ. Both are good up to a top speed of 200 km/hr, being able to accelerate from rest to 100 km/hr in around 10 seconds. A direct injection petrol engine produces 150 hp, 10 hp more than the diesel. The diesel engine wins however with 320 Nm pulling power for the diesel engine against 200 Nm for the petrol engine. This explains exactly why these two engines in real life have very different characters.



The Scout 2.0 FSI (= petrol) performs nicely on back roads, climbs just like a mountain goat and moves smoothly through the city. But the 2.0 TDI (= diesel) scores even better on all fronts. The larger torque ensures significantly faster mid accelerations. On the motorway, the rpms stay lower, the result of which is a more comfortable ride in the Scout diesel. On top of which the Scout diesel is also considerably more economical.

Irrespective of the engine, the Scout is equipped with a very pleasant six-speed gearbox, which keeps consumption and engine noises to a minimum.

Uneven battle

Just outside of Turin lies Sestrière. The site of the biathlon track is on this occasion to be used as a test track. The steep slopes are under 10 cm snow, below which there is another 10 cm of thick mud. Even for a serious off-roader, this poses a serious challenge.

However, the Scout has neither low gearing (a special gearbox with adapted ratios for off-roading) nor mud tyres. In theory the turbo diesel test car is unsuitable for off-roading, at low rpms there is insufficient pulling power and when the turbo does spring into action there is so much power on hand that the Scout ends up digging in. The only weapons in this battle are a raised suspension (ground clearance of 18 cm) and four-wheel drive.



Even though you already trust the car when you get in, the same remains true off-road. In theory, the turbo diesel is less ideal for off-roading due to its irregular build-up of power; in reality, it's easier to control. Climbing steep slopes is absolutely no problem. When there is too much gas, the standard issue traction control corrects this slip effectively. In spite of the lack of low gearing, first gear has so much resistance that safe descents are easy.

Boulders and tree trunks do pose a problem. The ground clearance in the Scout is larger than that of the average car; however this is definitely not an off-roader. Moreover the front and rear overhang ensure that the bumpers of the test car touch the ground more than once during the intensity of battle; hence those infamous protective plates.



Because the Scout is just an ordinary car, it is much

easier to feel what is going on under the tyres. The Scout does slide and roll much less than a traditional off-road vehicle. This is a major plus point in all this slippery snow and treacherous mud. Here the Octavia Scout is not only an alternative for a SUV, it would appear that it is even better!

The Scout ploughs resolutely and stubbornly through the deep snow. Corners are taken with a controlled slide and the snow fun just doesn't stop! The Autozine test car left the test track at sunset as the very, very last car!

Conclusion

Simply Clever is Skoda's motto and this applies just as much to the Octavia Scout. The Scout was designed as a clever alternative to the SUV. The concept was successful. With its sturdy finish, the Scout is distinguishable from the ordinary Octavia, but the car is still sufficiently civilised that nobody could take offence to it as is the case of an off-road vehicle.

The driving qualities of the Octavia Scout are nearly exactly the same as though of the ordinary Octavia. Off road, the Scout does get surprisingly far; many a SUV driver wouldn't dare go nor do what an Octavia Scout can. For the moment, there doesn't seem to be an end to this Scouting pleasure; the Roomster will be joining the Scouts soon (Ivo Kroone). ■



Specifications

Skoda Octavia Scout 2.0 TDI PD Scout

Size and weight



Length x width x height	458 x 178 x 153 cm
Wheelbase	258 cm
Kerb weight	1.505 kg
Trailer	650 kg
Trailer - braked	1.600 kg
Fuel capacity	60 l
Luggage space	580/1620 l
Tyre size	225/50R17

Engine and performance



Capacity	1968 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/
Max power	140 PS @ 4000 rpm
Max torque	320 Nm @ 1750 rpm
Drive	four wheel drive
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.2 secs
Top speed	197 km/h
Average mileage	6.4 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	8 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	5.4 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	173 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 19,675
Price base model	Â£ 12,965