



Superb's neat dash



Luggage space is exceedingly generous

LITTLE IN LARGE

“For a car of such generous dimensions, the Superb can handle itself with some poise”

A small engine in a big car might be okay when driving solo, but is it any good for towing? Clive White sizes up such a combination in a Czech estate

With thanks to Chichester Caravans, Redhill for the loan of Towcar Test caravans. Call 01737 768266 or see chichester-caravans.co.uk.

WHY WOULD anyone want to buy a large car with a little engine for towing a caravan? It's a topic that polarises opinion among those who use their vehicles for towing, especially if they are frequent and/or long-distance tuggers. But in these cash-strapped times, anyone this side of an investment banker would surely appreciate the opportunity to save some cash, especially if it was possible to do

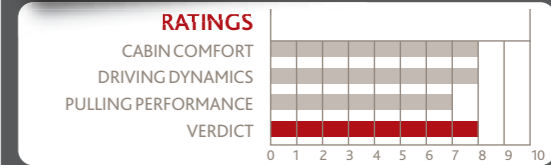
so without making too many compromises. It's the compromises that sometimes hurt, though. I have tried various small-capacity modern petrol and diesel-powered 'eco-friendly' cars in *The Caravan Club Magazine*, and the results have been variable. Unsurprisingly, the lighter, compact cars generally protest least at their loss of ccs. But if a big, spacious car could extract sufficient oomph from its shrunken lump to pull a caravan successfully, well, that's worth considering, isn't it?

CABIN COMFORT
As the Superb sits atop Volkswagen Passat underpinnings, it will come as no surprise to find the Skoda leaning heavily on its German owner's equivalent saloon/estate for much of its interior design. Nevertheless, Skoda blends in enough Czechoslovakian-ness to give the Superb some individuality. Having said that, any Passat pilots will find themselves in entirely familiar territory as far as the fascia and controls

are concerned. The large, analogue speedo and tacho incorporate engine coolant temperature and fuel gauges, and straddle the neat multifunction info display. In the centre, the smart sat-nav touchscreen also displays audio and climate-control functions. Switchgear is neatly and logically arranged; though, for anyone unfamiliar with the Superb, markings are rather small. No problem after using the controls a couple of times. At risk of being boringly repetitive, but for the benefit of readers who may not

have seen our various Superb tests before, there can be few, if any, cars in this class that offer the Skoda's interior space. Rear legroom is exceptionally generous, which, together with its ability to swallow up luggage aplenty, makes the Superb an attractive proposition for a family of five – or possibly for a well-equipped caravanning couple. While it might be tempting to buy the hatchback Superb just to be able to play with its amusingly-clever Twindoor bootlid/tailgate, the estate

TECHNICAL



RRP	£24,260
Engine	1,598cc, in-line 4-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel. Transverse
Power	103bhp (77kW) @ 4,400rpm
Torque	184lb ft (259Nm) @ 1,500-2,500rpm
CO ₂	114g/km
Transmission	Five-speed manual, FWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/13.2gal (60 litres)/ 56.9mpg solo/30.6mpg towing 1,250kg
Kerbweight	1,471kg
Gross vehicle weight	2,109kg
Gross train weight	3,609kg
Noseweight limit	80kg
Towing equipment	Detachable towbar £240, towing electrics £135, supplementary electrics kit £45 – plus approx 4hrs fitting
Spare wheel	Inflation kit
Insurance	Group 15E
Superb Estate model-range	£24,260 (1.6 TDI CR GreenLine II) to £30,755 (3.6 V6 4x4 DSG)

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info: skoda.co.uk



“ For towing, the firm suspension did a good job of keeping everything together ”

unsurprisingly has the larger load capacity of 633 litres (against 595 litres). But, surprisingly, the hatch counters with a longer boot floor to the rear seats at 1,075mm to the estate's 1,058mm. Then the estate fights back with its floor cargo tracks, enabling the fitting of clever, adjustable load restraints.

DRIVING DYNAMICS

Just 1.6 litres may seem a bit puny for such a substantial vehicle, especially with only 103bhp (105PS) at its disposal, and the cynics among us might be forgiven for suggesting this GreenLine version is but a ploy to reduce the Superb range's average CO₂ figures.

However, I suspect that anyone unaware of the power unit would drive

the Superb and imagine that it had a reasonably-powerful 2.0-litre diesel under the bonnet. There's certainly enough torque available to cover for any lack of horses and the car can hold its own in just about any driving conditions, especially with intelligent use of the gears.

It does surprise me, though, that the car's manual gearbox is endowed with only five ratios, as some wide spaces can become apparent between gears, especially second to third. Maybe the weight and/or cost penalty would be too great, but a six-speeder would give a nice high cruising gear while keeping the intermediate gears a bit closer, and enable the sometimes intrusively high final-drive gearing to be lowered a little. It was a pain at low speeds having to hold a high-revving second gear because third was on the threshold of idle speed and would set the car shunting in slow moving traffic.

As it is, the shift indicator in the info display is sometimes a bit optimistic, and if obeyed can result in the engine slogging away at uncomfortably low revs.

For a car of such generous dimensions, the Superb can handle itself with some poise. Nicely geared and accurate steering in combination with an unexpectedly sporty suspension

set-up (it's lowered in the interests of improved aerodynamics) found the Superb eagerly tackling rural byways. The drawback for this cornering prowess was, predictably, a sometimes niggly ride on poor surfaces.

This was possibly more noticeable because of the rather noisy low rolling-resistance tyres on this GreenLine version, which no doubt acquire their enthusiasm to roll courtesy of a hard rubber compound.

PULLING PERFORMANCE

So, crunch time. Can 1.6 litres effectively shift the Superb's weight plus a reasonably-sized caravan? Soon to find out...

But first, I'd be pleased if Skoda fitted the 13-pin plug so it swung down anti-clockwise from behind the bumper. Why? Well, it wouldn't try to fold itself away again whenever an obstructive 13-pin plug was attempting an insertion! That's my mini-rant done.

Okay, will it pull that caravan? Yes, it will, though a standing start to 60mph in 22 seconds is hardly going to set the world alight – nor the tyres for that matter. That's not much of a problem though, as a more realistic drag to 50mph in around 15sec is pretty respectable, and 30-50mph in 9.5sec is as good as most. So our mini-engined mammoth isn't going to hold up the traffic.

Unsurprisingly, those gaps between gears did appear more frequently when towing, and the upshift arrow often had to be ignored in favour of instinct. But with just a little adjustment to driving technique, the Superb showed up very few shortcomings.

For towing, that firm suspension did a good job of keeping everything together. The ride remained a little on the jiggly side when the ever-present potholes couldn't be avoided, but caravan pitching was well damped, as was cornering and directional changes. Motorway stability, too, was never in question with little more than an aerodynamic nudge caused by passing trucks or a crosswind gust. ■

VERDICT

Back to those ecological compromises, then. Thing is, this Superb hardly imposes any. If you need a big car without the big car expenses and still want to tow a reasonably-sized caravan, then get in line for a GreenLine.



Superb looks good from any angle