

DOCTOR ON THE ROAD: VOLKSWAGEN POLO GTI



There's a hole in this Polo

The VW Polo GTI has grown to the same size of some previous versions of the sporty Golf – favourite among many doctors. But can it match the ultimate thrills offered by competitors?

Our motoring correspondent **Dr Tony Rimmer** (left) finds out



WE MEDICS tend to be level-headed, pragmatic and appreciative of good design. In our work, we are much happier working with high-quality kit that is more likely to get the job done safely and efficiently.

This tends to produce better outcomes for our patients. It is also more professionally satisfying to operate equipment and systems that work with predictable reliability.

It is no wonder, then, that when it comes to choosing a new car, we gravitate towards the higher-quality premium brands.

For many years, the go-to car maker for many medics was Volkswagen. Its products were practical with solid build quality and no-nonsense Germanic design.

Grown in size

If you were a bit of a petrol head, you could choose the Golf GTI, the ultimate car to cover all needs ranging from high practicality to excellent driving dynamics.

The current Golf GTI Mark 8 remains a great car, but has grown in size and price. What many of us are looking for is a sporty hatch-

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back that costs less, works comfortably as a daily drive or as a second car to have some fun in but remains useful and practical.

So what about the Volkswagen Polo? They do a GTI version and it is the perfect size – the same as the old Golf Mark 4.

I have been testing the latest Polo GTI, last updated in 2021 to include better tech and some mild bodywork tweaks.

It is powered by the 2.0litre turbo petrol engine that we know well from the Golf and produces a healthy 204bhp linked to a seven-speed direct-shift gearbox (DSG) dual clutch transmission.

No manual gearbox

Unfortunately, for a sporty car, you cannot get a manual transmission and this, in my view, marks against it as a true driver's car. Both its closest competitors – the Ford Fiesta ST and the Hyundai i20N benefit from manual shifts.

You cannot complain about the interior though. Every Polo has high-quality furnishings and these are supplemented in the GTI by some very comfortable sports seats and a lovely leather steering wheel.

The driving position is perfect and there is reasonable room in the back for two adults or three children to sit without feeling constricted.

Boot space is impressive, so this hot hatch can really function as a useful family runabout too. All the latest tech is on hand including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

Something lacking

Out on the road, this GTI feels solid and planted. The ride is, not unexpectedly, firm but not uncomfortable.

Performance is strong as one would expect and the Polo is the perfect size to tackle our relatively narrow roads, so it can be driven with great gusto on any cross-country trip.

The steering is pretty sharp and there is minimal body roll, but I found that swift driving revealed something lacking in the driving experience. It was difficult to focus on why this was.

All the elements are there to produce a car that is just as sporty and just as quick as its Golf GTi brother, but it just is not as rewarding or as much fun for the keen driver.

Both the Fiesta ST and the i20N are more enjoyable and entertaining to drive. The lack of a manual gearbox may have something to do with it, but a Golf GTI with the same DSG box and almost the same engine is better.

If you drive in a more relaxed manner, the Polo starts to show its real strengths. It is a quiet and comfortable companion on long trips, whereas its competitors would be noisier and more frenetic.

Fuel consumption is impressive, too, with an overall 40mpg being realistic and I even saw 45mpg on a round trip to Shropshire.

So, the latest Polo model is a

well-made quality product that is roomy, comfortable, well equipped and refined.

But, unfortunately, the GTI is a bit of a mixed bag. It looks smart and sporty and you cannot complain about the extra performance on tap.

As long as you do not expect the ultimate thrills that competitors offer, you will not be disappointed. Perhaps the more cultured and mature character will be more appealing to us level-headed medics. ■

Dr Tony Rimmer is a former NHS GP practising in Guildford, Surrey

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VOLKSWAGEN POLO GTI 2.0 TSI

- Body: Five-seat hatchback, front-wheel drive
- Engine: 2.0 litre four-cylinder turbo petrol
- Power: 204bhp
- Torque: 320Nm
- Top speed: 149mph
- Acceleration: 0-62mph in 6.5 seconds
- Claimed economy: Combined 41.5mpg
- CO₂ emissions: 154g/km
- On-the-road price: £28,540