

SEAT LEON X-PERIENCE

By Jim Mc Cauley



Not so long ago Audi clearly ruled the roost within the VAG group in terms of aesthetics and technical excellence. But as the individual manufacturers gained corporate freedom and wider access to developing technologies a greater competitive edge had emerged where one manufacturer can no longer be seen as the leader of the pack. Among the winners of the shared technologies is SEAT who reinforce their engineering desirability with elegant designs far removed from the visual weight of earlier models.

Test choice for several days high mileage driving with four adults and holiday luggage on board was the SEAT Leon X-PERIENCE, combining its powerful yet economical 2.0 litre turbo diesel with the added grip and performance of all-wheel drive. This car is distinguished by its lower body protective mouldings and slightly higher ride height than on the Leon ST on which it is based.

The 2.0 litre diesel engine is available in two power outputs – 184PS and 150PS - and it was the 150PS engine that featured in the test car. Driving through a 6-speed manual gearbox, the vehicle is capable of a 0-62mph time of 8.7 seconds with the potential to top 129 mph.

In looks, the model retains the elegance of the Leon range and carries the distinctive wheel-arch swage lines of the hatchbacks with the rear creases extending further back to wrap around the tailgate and complete a very sporting look for this lifestyle estate. The body design is reflected in the door mirror casings and more importantly the theme continues in the interior detailing to complete a well interpreted holistic design that oozes with desirability.

And the attraction continues on the road with a quiet and ever-willing engine. The 6-speed gearbox features a relatively short throw and precise engagement with the excellent torque base of the 2.0 litre power unit providing good





in-gear flexibility as well as immediate response when required. For the majority of the 500 plus miles covered in the Leon X-PERIENCE, the car was fully loaded with four adults and holiday luggage which made the overall performance all the more noteworthy. And while the suspension provided excellent support, it did so without encroaching on comfort demands.

Although the car is all-wheel drive, it is in the economy chasing sense of majoring on front wheel drive only until the need for additional grip is required when up to 50% of power can

then be transferred to the rear wheels. While maintaining the characteristics of a front wheel drive vehicle it gives the driver the confidence of additional safety provision as well as the ability to handle low grip off-road surfaces.

Accommodation-wise, the Leon X-PERIENCE offers comfortable 5-seater provision with excellent rear leg room and a massive boot of 587 litres capacity. In the higher 'SE Technology' trim level of the test vehicle the interior was fitted with sports seats finished in black leather and brown Alcantara inserts to match the Adventure Brown custom paint of the exterior.

For the driver, the analogue instruments are clearly presented with selectable digital speed readout as well as an easy to navigate central infotainment screen. Excellent fit of the interior mouldings demonstrate how it should be done with superb fit between the dash and door cappings to give continuity to the cabin-wide sweep that encompasses the front seat occupants.

Passengers also benefit from automatic air conditioning, roof grab handles and courtesy lights at night in both and front and rear of the cabin.

In addition to the safety advantages of all-wheel drive, the Leon X-PERIENCE features seven airbags including a driver's knee unit while this trim level also featured Cruise Control with 'Front Assist' incorporating the emergency braking system. This warns the driver at speeds over 18mph of an impending rear end collision and primes the brakes so that he or she may take action. At speeds below 18mph, the system will automatically apply the brakes if the driver fails to respond in start / stop city driving situations.



Overall, the SEAT Leon X-PERIENCE proves that there is more than one brand within the VAG group that can compete for top honours, and at a competitive price as well. The model range impressed

Northern Ireland's motoring journalists sufficiently to vote the Leon as their 'Family Car of the Year' for 2016, highlighting its many attributes above the competition.



In terms of running costs, the model tested has an official combined fuel consumption of 57.6 mpg, but over 500 miles of mixed driving with a full complement of passengers and luggage, the car recorded 49.1mpg, a well above average of 85% of the official figure. In less demanding circumstances there is no reason why this model should not nudge even closer to the official mpg.

With a CO2 emissions of 129 gms/km, the model as tested is in Band D for zero annual road tax. The car is in Group 26E for insurance purposes and is covered by SEAT's

comprehensive 3-year warranty. The model tested is listed at £26,370 and available extras include special paint finishes at £700, rear side airbags at £300 and Adaptive Cruise Control with Front Assist at £505.