

SEAT Leon Cupra 280

By Jim Mc Cauley



Long in the shadows dominated by their VAG partner Audi, the Spanish brand of SEAT has offered a more basic solution within the group's diverse portfolio. But things change, sometimes slowly and occasionally dramatically, and if recent SEATs merited a second glance, then the new Leon range attracts only one long lingering look of admiration.

With the standard range now well established, SEAT has chosen to take it to the ultimate level and launch the Cupra performance version which not only tops the Leon range but does so as the most powerful production model ever produced by the company. Featuring a 2.0 litre engine with a choice of two power outputs and

manual or automatic gearboxes, the model is additionally offered in a choice of two bodystyles, 3-door and 5-door. But there is more to the bodystyles than the number of doors as the design of the 3-door differs significantly with a 35mm shorter wheelbase, lower roofline, more steeply raked tailgate and greater accentuation of the rear 'power lines' stepped out over the wheelarches. The revised styling makes a massive visual impact and assigns to the car a more assertive sporting character as opposed to the attractive practicality of the 5-door. Test choice is the higher output option, its 280 PS capping that of the lower output unit by just 15 PS.

As expected a 15 PS difference is not going to make a lot of difference and in the benchmark 0-62 mph sprint the advantage is a mere one-tenth of a second at 5.8 seconds with both cars capable of an identical top speed of 155 mph. Similar torque outputs of 350 Nm from 1750 rpm through to 5300 rpm further narrows the gap between the two engine choices with impressive pulling power to hand across all six ratios. Handling is supported by a dynamic chassis control package (DCC) and a front axle differential lock which maintains excellent cornering traction and eliminates torque steer enhancing the performance appeal of the car. Riding on 19-inch wheels the suspension deals less sympathetically with varying road surfaces than the set-up on the lower output engine





suggesting that the latter might be the preferred choice for everyday driving, while the 280 PS model is for special occasions and track days. To increase the performance edge, the DCC package allows the driver to alter the responses of steering, accelerator and suspension with the three fixed menu settings of Comfort, Sport and Cupra, while an Individual setting permits more precise options.

Accommodation-wise, the new Leon SC is a full 5-seater with good rear access and despite the narrowing of the cabin in the 3-door compared to the 5-door model, there remains adequate shoulder room in the rear. Snug sports seats up-front hold the occupants comfortably, and while the cabin reflects the quality finish of the exterior which has tighter panel fit than Audi, the instrumentation and dash design are more Teutonic and a little at odds with the flair and flow of the exterior lines. However there are no shortcomings in terms of equipment with cruise

control, DAB radio, dual zone climate control and front and rear parking sensors all standard. Also standard are seven airbags, including a driver's knee unit, automatic LED headlights, rain sensing wipers and heated door mirrors with kerb-view function when reversing.

The new Leon is a serious advance design-wise for SEAT, and the Cupra derivative is a fitting model to top the range. Despite its performance, the model has a combined fuel consumption of 42.8 mpg and with a CO2 emissions of 154 gms/km is in Band G for annual car tax. The model tested is listed at £26,945 for the 3-door model with the 5-door carrying a premium of £300.

