

## SEAT Leon SC

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 SC attracts only one long lingering look of admiration.

The company claims that it has one of the most beautiful cars that SEAT has ever made; I would safely argue that it is one of the best looking cars the VAG Group has ever produced with origami bodywork neatly creased to strengthen the image as well as the structure.

Launched in the wake of the arrival of the 5-door Leon, 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 definite sporting character.

As with any VAG product, there is a supermarket choice of power units, and driven at launch was the 1.4 litre 140PS petrol option as well as the 1.6 litre 105PS diesel, the latter fitted with the superb DSG automatic transmission. Cost-wise, both models slot in under the psychological barrier of a £20,000 price tag.

With its stunning good looks, performance expectations are high as you settle into the quality cabin. First off is what will be the UK's top seller, the 1.6 litre TDI model in mid range SE trim. Fitted with the optional DSG transmission, the car is very well balanced with the 7-speed gearbox stepping virtually seamlessly through the gears. Suspension is on the firm side, as expected, but nicely damped to provide acceptable comfort to maintain enjoyment over more challenging roads. In raw terms, it covers the benchmark 0-62 mph dash in 10.7 seconds with the potential to top 119



mph, and with brakes to match provides the confidence to press on. On the SE trim and above, the handling system's Electronic Stability Control is supported by an electronic limited slip differential (XDS) which manages the braking system to mimic the operation of a mechanical version to prevent understeer during high speed cornering.

On the 1.4 litre TSI model, its 140PS unit driving through its standard 6-speed manual gearbox takes it from rest to 62 mph in 8.2 seconds with the potential to top out at 131 mph. With a lighter engine in a body in both cars that weighs 113 Kg lighter than the preceding MkII Leon, the 1.4 is less settled on its suspension with a tad more road noise entering the cabin. Power delivery needs to be accessed around 3000 rpm for smooth progression through the exacting precision of the manual gearbox, and the car charms with its eagerness on the road.

Accommodation-wise, the new Leon SC is a full 5-seater with good rear access and despite the narrowing of the cabin 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.

The new Leon SC is a serious advance design-wise for SEAT, and will no doubt help to expand the company's current buoyant position in the UK market. In addition to the standard trim levels of S, SE and FR, a number of packs are available including the Technology Pack which features a full LED headlight system, navigation inclusion and DAB radio tuner. Normally priced at £1,915, this is included free of charge as a launch incentive.

On the economy front, the 1.6 litre diesel model as tested has an official combined fuel consumption of 72.4 mpg, and with a CO2 emissions of 102 gms/km is in Band B for annual car tax. The 1.4 litre petrol model has a stated combined fuel consumption of 54.3 mpg and with a CO2 emissions of 119 gms/km is in band C for annual car tax. For business users, both models have a BIK rating of 15%.