

SKODA RAPID SPACEBACK

By Jim Mc Cauley

Skoda have expanded their Rapid model range with the addition of a 5-door hatchback, entering the high-volume compact segment for the first time. The 7- model range will be sold in over 100 countries with a choice of five engines – three petrol and two diesel, offering power outputs from 86PS to 122PS.



The new model sits on a long 2.6 metre wheelbase and with its slim pillars and generous glass area could be seen as a compact estate, offering the best rear legroom and headroom in sector. It also offers a luggage volume of 415 litres, extendible to 1380 with the rear seats folded.

Styling-wise, the Spaceback is pleasantly penned, the new corporate nose design asserting the manufacturer's identity while a gently sloping tailgate window adds rear-end elegance to what is otherwise safe and well balanced exterior lines. In addition, a degree of personalisation can be added with the full-length panoramic glass sunroof extending to over 1.7 metres and an elongated rear window which extends the hatch glazing a further 100mm lower.

The 1.6 litre diesel engine is available in either 90 or 105PS outputs with the lower output unit driving the front wheels via a 5-speed manual gearbox or 7-speed DSG transmission. This returns a 0-62 mph time of around 12 seconds with a potential top speed in excess of 114 mph.

On road, the diesel engine is relatively refined with excellent suspension support and steering accuracy enhancing the character of the car, very much in keeping with that of the original Rapid. The petrol engine options feature two 1.2 litre TSI units of 86 and 105PS outputs as well as a 122PS 1.4 litre TSI unit. The lower output engine drives via a 5-speed manual gearbox while the higher output one gains an extra ratio. The 1.4 litre engine uses the company's excellent 7-speed DSG automatic transmission, cutting the 0-62mph time to under 10 seconds and providing the highest

top speed at 127mph. However, the downside of this engine is its higher fuel consumption of 48.7 mpg on the official combined cycle, compared to 55.4 and 52.3 mpg for the 86 and 105PS engines. The diesels on the other hand stretch to 64.2 mpg.



Behind the wheel, the petrol models handle impressively, hinting at their Volkswagen Golf underpinnings with initial sharper acceleration than the diesels. On the open road, the petrol cars are quiet and relaxing with their greater agility increasing their appeal over the diesels.

Accommodation-wise, the cars are surprisingly roomy with excellent rear room and a well finished cabin, more than comfortable for long journeys. On vehicles in top 'Elegance' trim, both front seats have height adjustment and rear seat passengers have pocket storage on the backs of the front seats as well as good storage in the well proportioned door compartments.

Overall, the Rapid Spaceback extends the quality appeal of the Skoda brand with a vehicle that exudes quality and solid construction. A 5-way engine choice satisfies customer preferences and ultimately the pricing of the car has to persuade potential customers into the showroom. The petrol range starts at £14,340 and extends to £18,900 for the range topping diesel with the DSG gearbox in Elegance trim.

On the safety front the car has gained a 5-star EuroNCAP award and all models feature Electronic Stability Control along with a full complement of twin front, side and head airbags. Depending on specification levels additional active safety features can include xenon headlights, tyre pressure control, front fog lights with cornering function and 'Hill-hold Control' for gradient take-offs. Like all Skodas, the new models are covered by the company's comprehensive 3-year / 60,000 mile warranty.