

SKODA SPACEBACK TSI

By David M Ross



Sometimes, but thankfully not very often, a car comes along that totally mystifies me. With all this crossover stuff and so many categories, it's often difficult to pigeon-hole a new car as designers attempt to make their vehicles ever more versatile.

Estate cars that come with a huge performance capability and sports cars with lots of practicality blur exactly what they are – or even what they are intended to be.

But that's not something I would expect of a Skoda. The Roomster is roomy, the Citigo is ideal for running around the city and the Superb is exactly what it says it is.



One exception is the Rapid as it is not particularly quick. Pity, it cries out for a bit more umph as the chassis is as competent as you'd expect from a manufacturer that has not only been around a long time but also has an impressive competition history.

Still, I thought I knew exactly what a Rapid was and had no concerns when I turned up for the launch of the Rapid Spaceback – a Rapid with lots more space in the back – an estate car surely.

But it's not, not according to Skoda. It's a super little car but Skoda says it's a hatchback. And, while at first that seems nonsense, once you take a long hard look at the Spaceback, you begin to see what the Czech car maker is getting at. And, style-wise, I like it.

But, horror of horrors, what you don't get is the large and commodious load area I was expecting. A bit of misinformation from Skoda? Actually, no. The reason being that what the Spaceback name refers to is the big space in the rear for people. There's plenty for luggage but not much more than in the Rapid saloon. It's the rear seat passengers who reap the Spaceback benefit.

So, as a family hold-all, the Spaceback is stylish, accommodating, very comfortable front and rear, economical and, very importantly, built to VW brand standards. The interior being especially impressive with its wonderful build quality and the way everything works so effortlessly and precisely.



Engines? We've heard all about the diesels and it's those I would have thought would most appeal to me. I love that torrent of torque that makes for such a marvellous and responsive drive but, gradually, I have found myself won over in other VW Group cars by the likes of the 1.2 and 1.4 TSI turbocharged four-cylinder petrol units.

Silky smooth and, with forced induction, near turbo-diesel levels of torque, the TSI is sensationally responsive and so impossibly quiet it's difficult to tell if the engine is running at tick-over.

Out on the road it's impressive too. Amazingly smooth and quiet, the engine just appears to get on with it but, when asked to pick the pace up, it sends the Rapid Spaceback zooming off down the road. And it's effortless when tackling steep gradients too.



There's little if any discernible performance difference between the 1.2 and 1.4 TSIs. If you want a manual gearbox, that's what you get with the 1.2TSI. Opt for a DSG semi-automatic and that comes with the 1.4TSI. As to power options, they run from 86PS to 122PS. Fuel consumption is in the mid 50mpg region while CO2 emissions start at 114g/km for the GreenTech version and run to 134g/km for the

1.4 TSI 122PS DSG.

Acceleration to 62mph from rest takes 11.7 seconds with the 1.2 86PS engine and that drops to 10.2 seconds with the 1.2 105PS while the 1.4 122PS reduces that still further to 9.4 seconds. As for top speed, that's 112mph for the 86PS, 120mph for the 105PS and 126 for the 1.4 122PS.

It was no surprise to find the steering and brakes were well up to the standards set by similarly sized Volkswagen and Audi models while the suspension coped well with road undulations and pot holes.

The Spaceback interior is a thoroughly nice place to be with lots of glass all-round so it's airy and, with well contoured seating, comfortable in front or rear.

As for prices, TSI models starts at £14,340 and run to £17,980 with S, SE and Elegance trims while there are also the especially economical GreenTech versions. Standard equipment is generous and optional equipment reasonably priced.

It might be said that there are more exciting models in Skoda's line-up and I'd go along with that but when the excitement wears off, the Spaceback will go on providing sterling service, especially as a genuinely practical and versatile family hold-all.