

Volkswagen Passat Alltrack

By Jim Mc Cauley

Almost unnoticed compared to the mainstream range, but look closely and a few differences can be spotted. The Passat Alltrack introduces all-wheel drive to Volkswagen's flagship estate model in a marketplace where it has to justify its existence against similarly priced SUVs and lower priced crossovers, all from within the all-embracing VAG Group before considering what lies beyond.

The eagle-eyed will spot the 30mm increase in ride height and cosmetic 'protection' panels on the bodywork, but fortunately the sump guard underneath is solid metal. The overall result retains the visual balance of the car which allows it to keep its all-wheel drive ability as a closely guarded secret.



Power source is a two-way choice from the same 2.0 litre turbo diesel engine outputting either 140PS with a 6-speed manual gearbox or 170PS with a 6-speed DSG automatic transmission. Test choice was the latter, which like the lower powered manual version delivers its power to all four wheels via a Haldex electrohydraulic coupling. Normal bias is 90 per cent distribution to the front wheels with virtually instantaneous transfer to the rear axle when driving and surface conditions demand.

While unlikely to be purchased as a hard-working off-road vehicle, the technology nevertheless is present, and when 'Off Road' mode is selected it activates 'Hill Descent Assist' which controls the descent speed of the vehicle without applying the brakes. The anti-lock braking system is also altered to provide improved braking on loose surfaces while the electronic differential lock reacts faster to prevent wheelspin.

Potential customers with serious off-road work in mind will probably opt for an SUV but the Alltrack however offers all of the electronic support packages necessary should the need arise.

On-road, and the car's overall refinement distances it from any notion of burying it up to the axles in mud in any off-road excursion, but the on-road security of all-wheel drive in poor weather and surface conditions as well as the ability to lay down power earlier on corner exiting give added kudos.

The higher output power unit with the DSG gearbox adds a sporting touch to the car (0-62mph in 8.9 seconds), although suspension remains on the comfort side maintaining an overall pleasant rather than sporting ride.

With the model pricing taking it over the £30,000 barrier, it features a high specification level which includes stop/start function, front and rear parking sensors, cruise control with incorporated 'Driver Alert' warning, 2-Zone electronic climate control, 'see-me-home' headlights and auto-dimming rear view mirrors. Also on this

model is a multi-function steering wheel, power adjustment on the driver's seat, tyre pressure monitoring system and touchscreen audio / navigation unit.

Overall, the Passat Alltrack offers a discreet and capable all-wheel drive alternative to the sector's dominant SUV models. It may lack the ground clearance (165mm) for serious off-road rough and tumble, but it has appeal for increased on-road performance and sensible off-road excursions, particularly for those who tow, with this all-wheel drive model increasing the braked towing capacity to 2000Kg - 200Kg more than the front-wheel drive equivalent.

The model tested is listed at £31,030 and is covered by Volkswagen's 3-year /

60,000 mile warranty. Selected extras on the test vehicle included bi-xenon headlights at £1,000, panoramic sunroof at £885 and metallic paint at £495.

