

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Volkswagen Golf GTi 2.0-litre TSI DSG



VW had let the famous GTi badge gather dust a little, until it reintroduced a truly hot version in the form of the Mk V Golf. Now, 32 years on from the model's UK debut, the Golf GTi is back in the showrooms as a Mk VI. Over three decades separate it from the original - with many fine versions in between - so how does the latest car measure up?

After a week living with a five-door, DSG-gearbox-equipped car, I can only say: "Very well indeed." It's still a terrific car – but not a terrific 'little' car any more, as the requirements of safety and passenger comfort mean it's now a sizeable 4213mm-long, 1786mm-wide hatchback. For comparison, it's also appreciably taller than a BMW 3 Series (1479mm vs. 1418mm).





Well, hold on a second, isn't that what the Golf GTi's all about? Practicality mixed with performance in the discreet outline of middle-class Britain's favourite motor car? Absolutely, and in Mk VI guise the power from the turbocharged four-cylinder is now up from 200PS to 210PS, with 206lb ft torque available from 1700 to 5200rpm, so you **will** get the pace to go with the space.

True to form, VW has kept the GTi's additional styling simple and classic: just a rear spoiler, a new front bumper below the famous 'red line' grille, subtly modified side skirts and a twin exhaust-pipe treatment framing a revised rear diffuser. The tartan fabric is still standard - although our car was trimmed in the optional 'Vienna' black leather, a £1675 extra that also includes heating and electric adjustment - and the front sports seats are as perfect for long journeys as they are for seat-of-your-pants cornering. Rear-seat passengers will like both the extra legroom and headroom afforded by the latest bodyshell.



It is a brilliantly practical package.

The DSG-type 'box is a bit of an unknown for me - my experience, so far, being limited to a few laps in a PDK 911. I'll spare you the technical stuff; suffice to say that it blends the smoothness of a torque-converter with the mechanical accuracy of a sequential, Ferrari-type set-up. Its two wet clutches (controlling, in effect, two separate 'boxes) ensure that the next highest gear can be engaged in 4/100ths of a second. You can either leave it in 'auto', or use the paddles or gearlever to change gear.

The result is that, either way (manual or auto), when you floor the throttle and the engine reaches the high 6000s, it *instantly* pops into the next gear. And I use the expression 'pops' as that is the sound you hear in the generally quiet, acoustically well-insulated cabin. It's a bit like the effect you get trackside at Le Mans with the cars disappearing up to Mulsanne, the revs seeming to drop as they reach the highest gears.



The transmission will 'creep' at junctions and has, as standard, an auto hold function that prevents the car rolling back on an incline. With it increasingly being fitted across the VAG product range it is, no doubt, the future for automatics. As an aside, such is its efficiency that the new car's CO2 emissions rise from an impressive 170g/km for the manual to only 173g/km for the DSG.

The 'Sport' setting will make the engine rev higher and give maximum performance but I felt that it upset the sophisticated dynamics of the car. Perhaps I'm getting old.

The new Golf GTi shares many parts with the [Scirocco we tested earlier this year](#). The steering wheel is the same, Adaptive Chassis Control (ACC - not fitted to our test car) is an option on the GTi but standard on the Scirocco, while the engine is from the same family but does push out a few more horsepower. As a measure of where the company positions the car, in the UK a five-door DSG Golf GTi will cost you £1700-or-so more than the equivalent coupé.

A premium product and, at £27,795 as tested, a premium price.

The flat power and torque curves produce meaty acceleration with no pronounced peaks, and this effect is matched by a chassis that's hard-riding but not unbearable. It's fine on smooth roads and pretty good on country roads - only bumpy, so-called 'smooth' British highway with horizontal ridges causes the car to joggle and jar. I'd like to try the standard 17in - rather than 18in - wheels. 3500rpm in 6th equates to a handy 90mph cruise, by the way.



Up front, the electro-mechanical steering appears light (as it should do) at low speeds, becoming more weighted as the limits of the car are explored. I liked it and I was also impressed with the electronic cross-axle traction control, XDS. This virtually eliminates any torque-steer and allows the driver to really push-on in the wet. Under extreme cornering on a rough road, even an airborne front wheel is kept in check with minimal feedback through the steering wheel.

The ever-efficient Volkswagen UK press office supplied some fascinating information on the UK and its love affair with the hot Golf. From 1977 to 2008, a total of 217,214 GTis have been sold in Great Britain. This is up to the end of the Mk V's life and the big seller is the Mk II, at 80,307. The company expects first-year sales in 2010 to be 1750 cars (and 2200 GTDs).



It's not cheap, but then it is a worthy successor to the very best GTis of years past. It's frugal (29mpg, or around 9.7 litres/100km in my hands), understated, practical and well built. With enough performance (148mph, 0-62mph in 7.2 seconds) for most people, most of the time.

1750 in 2010? Make that 1751.

*The car tested was a five-door **VW Golf GTi 2.0-litre TSI DSG** with a basic 'on the road' recommended retail price in the UK of £24,305. Extras fitted were:*

RCD 510 touch-screen radio system including dash-mounted, MP3-compatible, six-CD autochanger with eight speakers and AUX-in socket for connection to an external multimedia source (£350); alternative alloys - 7½J x 18 '**Monza Shadow**' with 225/40 R18 tyres and anti-theft wheel bolts (£415); front and rear parking sensors and rear-view camera (£540); upholstery upgrade to '**Vienna**' leather, includes heated front sports seats, electrically adjustable driver's seat lumbar support and front passenger lumbar adjustment (£1675); luxury pack - electrically foldable door mirrors, door puddle lights and reverse-activated kerb-view adjustment on passenger's door mirror (£115); **Reflex Silver** metallic paint (£395).

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