

Motoring New Car Road Test

Skoda's Octavia vRS Estate brings

The Octavia vRS has historically been an extremely useable performance model, but can this new model achieve the same? **Jack Evans** finds out

SKODA has been on something of a winning streak of late. We drove the new Octavia a little while back and were blindsided by just how comfortable and refined it had become. Now, it's the turn of the performance-based vRS to show off what it can do.

It shares its powertrain with the latest Golf GTI but, in classic Skoda fashion, the Octavia vRS has been designed to err on the side of value-for-money more than its Volkswagen Group cousin. So let's get behind the wheel and find out what it's like.

What's new?

This is no mid-life refresh, oh no. This Octavia sits atop a new platform, bringing more in the way of interior space and better levels of practicality. It also brings a more angular look, with the sporty bodykit on the vRS only gaining more presence compared with the older version.

The interior is new, too, with far more technology and connectivity features than you might've found on the previous-generation car.

What's under the bonnet?

The Octavia vRS uses a 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol engine for drive, producing 242bhp and 370Nm. Power is sent to the front wheels through a seven-speed DSG automatic gearbox and Skoda quotes a 0-60mph time of 6.4 seconds and a top speed of 155mph.

Despite offering more than brisk performance, the vRS does well in the economy stakes, too. Skoda claims that you should be able to see up to 40.4mpg, with CO2 emissions of between 159-181g/km.

This isn't going to be the only engine on offer with the vRS, either. A similarly powerful plug-in hybrid variant is due to be available too, as well as a more conventional diesel. The former will certainly be a hit owing to CO2 emissions as low as 26g/km.



■ The new model has a more angular look

What's it like to drive?

We were quite taken aback by how well the 'standard' Octavia rides, so it's thankful that some of this has been carried over to the vRS. Yes, it's firmer – this is a performance-based car, after all – but it's got a set-up which has been masterfully judged for the road.

The steering is lighter than we've come to expect, but it's refreshingly easy to use. The gearbox, meanwhile, is smooth and responsive and, in truth, is best left to its own devices in fully automatic mode – though you can take control via the wheel-mounted paddles.

Then there's the engine. It bucks the trend of current 'performance' powertrains in that it doesn't crack, burble nor shout but gets the job done in a thoroughly understated fashion. The vRS isn't razor-edged and the engine reflects this, providing brisk, muscular performance. Combined with excellent body control and pleasantly sharp brakes, it ensures that the Octavia provides extra sparkle to a regular drive without making the whole experience too overbearing or tiresome.

How does it look?

Previous vRS models have nailed the understated brief and it's fair to say that it's

the same story again with this latest generation. It certainly has an elevated look over the regular Octavia, but it's neither shouty nor in-your-face; just as a performance Skoda should be, in our opinion.

Our car, in a light grey exterior colour, looked particularly stealthy. The whole car just has a wholeheartedly purposeful feeling to it, from the large front grille to the nicely widened arches. It's impressively well-judged as a whole and we're sure it'll be a hit with buyers who want a car which doesn't scream about its performance credentials. Given its long history of vRS models, you couldn't blame Skoda for shouting a bit with this latest Octavia. But it doesn't.

What's it like inside?

As we've previously mentioned, the new Octavia sits on a new architecture compared with before, meaning it's got more space to offer. Even sitting up front, it's clear to see how hard Skoda has worked to make the whole cabin feel brighter, while the level of build quality is good enough to put many premium manufacturers to shame. There are some lower-cost plastics used lower down the cabin, but to contrast that you have an Alcantara-lined dashboard and all manner of soft-press buttons. It's a great place to be.

There's a good amount of space for those taking residence in the back, too, while

boot space in this estate version is huge – 600 litres with the rear seats in place, or 1,555 litres with them down. It's a load area which dwarfs even those cars in the class above. For context, you'll get just 500 litres of space in a BMW 3 Series Touring.

What's the spec like?

If there's one thing Skoda knows how to do, it's to make a car which offers impeccable value-for-money. Prices for the Octavia vRS start from £31,425 and even there, you're getting a wealth of standard equipment.

Our car, in the UK, chimed in at £36,240, with the bulk of the additional cost put down to only a handful of optional extras, such as a panoramic roof (£1,150) and Dynamic Chassis Control (£925). But realistically, there's little need to trouble the options list when you've got features such as dual-zone climate control, 19-inch alloy wheels, full LED headlights and a ten-inch infotainment system all thrown in as standard. If it were our car, we'd leave the options selection alone and simply enjoy the huge variety of standard kit which is included with the vRS.

Verdict

It's almost becoming a chore to keep

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space and pace to the segment



Fast facts

- Model: Skoda Octavia vRS Estate
- Base price (UK): £31,495
- Model as tested: vRS Estate
- Price: £36,240
- Engine: 2.0-litre turbocharged petrol
- Power: 241bhp ■ Torque: 370Nm
- Max speed: 155mph
- 0-60mph: 6.4 seconds
- MPG: 40.4-35.3
- Emissions: 159-181g/km CO2
- From Motor Mall

praising Skoda models, but the Czech firm has made another stellar attempt with the Octavia vRS.

It's competitively priced, well finished

both inside and out and far more practical than rivals.

Add on top of this that it's excellent to drive quickly and refined at a cruise and

you find yourself looking at a car which really does tick many boxes.

A plug-in hybrid variant is an always a good option to have, but this standard

petrol version already makes a solid case for itself.

We reckon Skoda won't be able to make them quick enough.



■ Boot space is generous



■ The cabin's build quality could put many premium manufacturers to shame