

Confidence

By Joe Sage

This year, Volkswagen's SportWagen has moved from the Jetta lineup to Golf. If this sounds at first like a downsizing, remember that Jetta was born as a Golf with a trunk added, primarily for the US market in a time when hatchbacks were less popular, though the two have grown more distinct over time. The Golf lineup is all new for 2015, while Jetta received just a refresh. As Golf and SportWagen both have huge fans, it was a good time to migrate the badge and should produce a winning combo.

The car demonstrates exactly that. We started out at night, and controls and settings were well above average for ease of adjustment and customization. The only downside was a need to have the lights on to find some controls that we wish bore their own glow. We even needed a light to find the lights, but that's one more reason the universe has brought us smartphones.

If this is a compact car, and it is, you'd never know it by comfort or utility. We're over six feet but easily set up a comfortable and commanding driving position. (We did whack our knee, getting in and out, on a boxy protrusion on the lower side of the steering column; we're taking this as more a design-based than size-based deficit.)

The SportWagen has a healthy 66.5 cu.ft. of cargo space with the second row down, 30.4 with seats up and five people in place, all in a 15-foot-

long body that turns in a tight 35.8 feet.

In our own Golf SportWagen TDI, we'd want a manual transmission. We say that a lot, but the automatic was the only thing we had to, well, mitigate consistently during our week, by using the Tiptronic. We had quickly noted slightly doggy starts from a stoplight and got right into that. (We also have to remind ourselves that VW has you push the stick away for "+" and pull it back for "-", the opposite of most we're used to; of course there are paddle controls, too.) On the plus side, manumatic fixed everything, though we hate to be dependent upon that in an automatic.

The SportWagen TDI manual, by the way, gets the best fuel economy: 43 MPG highway, versus 42 MPG for the automatic.

With the manumatic in play, our quotient of magic grew exponentially. Overriding automatic shifts, we had a pretty solid sleeper on our hands, a nice clean but simple wagon in beautiful Tungsten Silver Metallic, one of the nicest greys or silvers you'll find, especially in our desert light, although Tornado Red is another nice choice. We had the control to command our lane positions at will or win the day at the top of a merging freeway ramp, even against the occasional pony car. This confidence is reflected in the car's well-penned lines—long, straight and lean, but curling subtly around the front wheels, conveying a feel-

ing of quiet power like a puma about to pounce.

The SportWagen TDI has just 150 hp (comparing to 170 for the 1.8T gasoline model), but typical of a diesel, it pumps out 236 lb-ft of torque, and that's where the magic lives (as long as you are using the Tiptronic).

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	2.0L TDI® Clean Diesel 4-cyl
TRANSMISSION	6-spd auto/Tiptronic/sport
DRIVETRAIN	FWD
HORSEPOWER/TORQUE	150 hp / 236 lb-ft
MPG	31/42/35 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$31,445
LIGHTING PACKAGE	995
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PACKAGE	695
DESTINATION CHARGE	820

TOTAL **\$33,955**

Our car's base price is just over \$30 grand, a nice price for top SEL trim. You could save about six grand with the base TDI wagon, three more if you went with gasoline (giving up 37 lb-ft of diesel torque and dropping fuel mileage by seven points). Our car was well equipped, with just two packages added—\$995 for bixenon headlights, LED running lights, adaptive front lighting and such, which we'd probably agree to include, and a package of collision warning and park distance control for \$695, which we could take or leave.

Typical of VW overall, the car generally matches the product and beats the price of a premium Audi from not many years earlier. ■

Wayne Gerdes and codriver Bob Winger of CleanMPG.com have just set a new Guinness World Record for "lowest fuel consumption 48 US contiguous States for a non-hybrid car," at 81.17 MPG—driving 8,233.5 miles through all 48 contiguous states in 16 days on \$294.98 of Shell Diesel fuel, topping the previous non-hybrid record of 77.99 MPG (also set by Gerdes, in a 2013 VW Passat TDI) by more than 3 MPG, and also beating the hybrid record of 74.34 MPG by almost 7 MPG. • VW Golf has just won the AutoPacific 2015 Ideal Vehicle Award for Best in Class for compact cars for the second consecutive year, based on a survey of more than 66,000 owners in 15 categories covering driving, features and safety.

