

Size and significance by Joe Sage

There are multiple ways to measure the world's top automaker—production, delivery or sales; calendar years or model years; full conglomerates and cross-partnerships. The top spots have been very close and juggling around for the past few years among Toyota, Volkswagen, GM, Renault-Nissan and Ford. Last year, VW nudged Toyota out of the top spot, per some but not all formulas.

Passat has grown from midsize to large car class, and with the Phaeton now dropped even in Europe, Passat is basically the biggest sedan in 2017 from the biggest automaker in 2016. It's not VW's biggest vehicle—the new seven-passenger Atlas SUV holds that spot—but no matter how you factor all of the above, it's a highly significant entry from a highly significant manufacturer.

Maybe we had grown accustomed to the sleek Volkswagen CC, or to the general proliferation of four-door coupes and other sleek five-seaters, thus spotlighting the Passat as a pleasing classic sedan, broadcasting its spacious cabin, all pulled together in solid, clean billet-style form.

This SEL Premium is the top 1.8T four-cylinder turbo trim; there are also two V6 models (see sidebar). V6 models use a 3.6L engine—twice the displacement (the car is about 10 percent heavier) for 65 percent more horsepower and 40 percent more

torque. Purchase price is about 10 percent higher and fuel mileage 14 to 18 percent lower, so if its mpg doesn't faze you, the V6 may be compelling.

On surface roads and freeways, the 1.8T accelerated like a fuel-sipping banshee, with no turbo lag. Gear ratios are considerably higher than in the V6 for the first four gears—some 53 percent higher in first—providing quick launches and nimble maneuvers, then about matching the V6 in 5th and 6th, for the same solid highway cruising. The lively 1.8T satisfied our lust for power—and mid-30s fuel mileage numbers will always be welcome.

VW packaging has been greatly simplified—our tester included everything in its base price. Top SEL trim includes impressive Fender Premium Audio, with a clean and thorough interface, impressive range over a three-band equalizer, and nice clean bass, as we'd expect from a company that made the guitars and amps we grew up with.

Passat is built in Tennessee with 59 percent NAFTA parts (30 percent US/Canadian and a Mexico-built engine). The transmission is from Japan.

The 1.8T Passat has so much perceived power, it's hard to wonder why you'd even need the V6; however, we'd love to try that and have little doubt it would answer that question. It must be a knock-out, because the turbo four is quite a performer. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ENGINE | 1.8L TSI DOHC turbo intercooled 4-cyl dir inj |
| DRIVETRAIN | FWD |
| HP/TORQUE | 170 hp / 184 lb-ft |
| TRANSMISSION | 6-speed automatic |
| SUSPENSION | F: strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar |
| | R: multilink w coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar |
| STEERING | rack & pinion, elec power assist |
| BRAKES | power assist, dual circuit |
| | F: 12.3x1.0 vented discs; R: 10.7x0.4 solid discs |
| WHEELS/TIRES | 18-in alum alloy / 235/45R18 94H AS |
| LENGTH / WB / GRND CLEAR | 191.9 / 110.4 / 5.4 in |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 36.4 ft |
| WEIGHT | 3263 lb |
| CARGO VOLUME | 15.9 cu.ft. |
| FUEL CAPACITY | 18.5 gal |
| MPG | 23/34/27 (city/hwy/comb) |

BASE PRICE..... **\$30,995**

VW CAR-NET® EQUIPPED: App-Connect (smartphone integration and interface); Guide & Inform (nav & infotainment); Security & Service (emergency assistance, remote access & vehicle health, limited emergency services w deliver, full trial available, subscription required).....incl

FORTANA RED PAINT / CORNSILK BEIGE INTERIOR.....nc

DESTINATION CHARGE.....820

TOTAL..... **\$31,815**

FULL VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT LINEUP

| | | |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1.8T | S | \$22,440 |
| | SE | 25,495 |
| | SE w/Tech | 27,995 |
| | SEL Premium (this sample) | 30,995 |
| R-Line | 1.8T R-Line | 23,975 |
| V6 | SE w/Tech | 29,295 |
| | SEL Premium | 33,995 |
| | V6 HP/TORQUE | 280 hp / 258 lb-ft |
| | V6 MPG | 20/28/23 (city/hwy/comb) |

