

It's not complicated

by
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VW's car lineup is both simple and complex. Set aside hatches, wagons and discontinued Beetles, and there are three sedans: big Arteon (evolved from CC), midsize Passat and compact Jetta. Set aside GLI, R-line, Premium and 4MOTION variants, and there are three fundamental trims for the Passat: S, SE, SEL.

Pick your model, pick your trim, and your job is pretty much done. Our sample driven here is that midsize trim, SE, on that midsize car, Passat. Check the specs in the sidebar: it's complete-as-is, simple yet thorough and effective. The pricing structure is short and sweet. Choose, sign and drive.

The SE is priced less than \$3000 higher than an S and adds a long list of standard features, including keyless entry-start, power seats, auto climate control, heated seats, additional rear USB ports, adaptive cruise and lane keeping, and much more.

The SE is priced more than \$5000 lower than a line-topping SEL and forgoes leather, a more advanced audio-nav unit, sunroof, bigger wheels and a few other things.

A fourth trim, R-Line (which we had set aside earlier for simplicity) has sporty trim elements and bigger wheels. Priced between SE and SEL, with a mix of features accordingly, it conveys a general air

of performance, though all models have the same drivetrain, steering, suspension and brakes.

Factoring features and price point, this SE is at a favorable balance point—demonstrably more than midway up the feature curve while less than midway up the price curve. Simple.

A little more complicated are a few of the controls, though any owner will get used to any vehicle's eccentricities. Notable are steering wheel-mounted interface controllers with a left-right up-down logic that reminds us of all the years VW's mirror controls were set up 90 degrees different from anybody else's, which we noted as "side-ways to the car and sideways in their behavior"; and a digital clock that requires digit-by-digit changing and confirming that reminds us of 1992.

There is a center armrest, but no console, and its underside is quite sharp (perhaps it's a lid in some other model), and it blocks the cupholders and a coin bin to a notable degree.

There may be mitigations to all of the above, but we had no owner's manual for deeper digging.

A big plus is the big trunk, almost 16 cu.ft. It doesn't open like other VWs, with their slick rocking VW emblem, but rather via a

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	.....2.0L inline-4 16v turbo/intercooled, TSI
HP / TORQUE	.....174 hp / 206 lb-ft
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
TRANSMISSION	.....6-spd auto
SUSPENSION	.....F: strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar; R: multi-link, coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING	.....elec power assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 12.3x1.0 vented; R: 10.7x0.4 solid disc
WHEELS / TIRES	.....17x7J alum-alloy / 215/55R17 94H AS
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....193.6 / 110.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.4 ft
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.4 in
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....38.3 / 37.8 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....42.4 / 39.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....15.9 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3325 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....regular unl / 18.5 gal
MPG23/34/27 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE \$25,845
DESTINATION CHARGE920

TOTAL \$26,765
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hatch-like release along the bottom lip.

Engine and suspension performance are solid, fuel mileage is quite good and the cabin is spacious and cleanly laid out. Check out feature functions for yourself. The price is right. ■

