

# ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

VOLUME 24 NUMBER 5  
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2025



Volkswagen  
Golf R

VEHICLES • EQUIPMENT • TECHNOLOGY • PEOPLE • EVENTS • DESTINATIONS • ATTRACTIONS



# Born ready. BY JOE SAGE

Meet the hot little hatch that graces this issue's cover, whether that's immediately obvious or not—the Volkswagen Golf R. Just R.

The history of the Golf R (and its predecessor, Golf R32) is fairly involved, enough so for its own book, but suffice it to say it has been intermittent, all with heightened performance, while with some of the key build specifics evolving (all the moreso when shopped against Golf GTI or even in parallel with comparable Audi cousins)—notably powertrain, transmission and door count, over time.

What we have now follows that pattern—this time, a four-door (or, as a hatch, five-door), with all-wheel drive (a huge plus), running through a direct-shift gearbox (no manual in the US this time).

Our chart at lower right shows power and price differentials between GTI and R. Compared to the

front-drive GTI's 241-hp 2.0-liter turbo, the AWD Golf R's 328-hp 2.0-liter turbo (up by 13 hp this year) has its cylinder head, pistons, valves, seats and springs modified, and has a larger intercooler and turbocharger. As an offshoot of its DSG transmission, it also receives an auxiliary oil cooler.

As obvious lust for the R sets in, note that while the GTI uses regular gas, Golf R requires premium.

Golf R also received a styling refresh this year—new headlights, illuminated grille and logo, and a more potent front bumper and fascia styling.

While there are three levels of GTI, there is only one of Golf R—basically—except this year has also offered a Black Edition (*not* what we are driving here). Compared with the base GTI, Golf R is about 50 percent pricier for (among other advantages) a 36 percent power advantage, though compared to

the top GTI, Golf R is only 15 percent pricier for that same 36 percent power advantage. Add in all the other variables, and Golf R definitely carries forward the value equation of GTI, if individual budget allows (including that ongoing higher fuel cost).

As with so much in life, there's nothing like a great first impression, and the Golf R gave us exactly that, in stages. We did setup of seats, mirrors, features and controls in the dark, easily. Even auto start-stop defeat was in plain sight before we even went looking.

The Golf R's cloth/velour seats can be seen as a distinctive plus, with just about everything else leather these days—a classic touch, more of a novelty, and with a sporty pattern (then on ours, a further upgrade as part of a \$3,795 Euro Style package, which also upgrades the door panels).

Seat adjustment is manual, but with power recline, and there is no mirror memory (at almost \$50k). On the seat, that's okay, adjust once and

done; for the mirrors, we wish we had it every time we back in and out of a space.

The car has sort of an alternative shift controller, something we often dislike because they may stop an unfamiliar (emergency or designated) driver in their tracks. But when you come down to it, this one is largely just a different style—its function does not particularly take special orientation. (We could, however, see keeping the same design, but making it larger, for both feel and importance.)

Style aside, the shifter is the gateway to one of the car's most pleasantly surprising key features—its DSG. Sure, if there were a manual offered, we'd order that by reflex. And if pressed, we might sum up two reasons people love manual transmissions as their entertainment factor and precision control. Well, great news—the VW Golf R as built provides plenty of entertainment as a whole. And the 7-speed DSG direct-shift gearbox provides a high level of precision control, often seeming capable of mind-reading your performance intentions.

Power is responsive and tight. The all-wheel-drive powertrain is precise and certain, as is the

steering, with any hints of front-drive heritage long since engineered away.

A bonus multilevel journey of discovery—directed to the area below the main level of the cargo floor, in the rear hatch (in search of a bit of documentation), we discovered a substantial center speaker and subwoofer, so big we at first thought it was a compact spare. This is one key to a very good Harman Kardon premium audio system, but was also our realization that the Golf R rides on perfectly fine Hankook run-flats with no obvious or apparent performance downside.

Go ahead, take the Volkswagen Golf R for a test drive if you want. You'll only need about a block. It scores pretty much "straight As," with power, pep, performance, its upgrades all purposeful (including those sporty cloth seats, the power mirror-seat delete, a simple spoiler). The precision of its DSG will make you forget you love a manual.

This is a hot hatch that is sure to delight not just a narrow target audience, but many others. A purity of mission and execution, achieved with a simple purity of style and performance. ■



## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Wolfsburg, Lower Saxony, Germany
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	.....Hungary / Germany
PARTS CONTENT	.....Germany 28% / Hungary 18% / US/Can 1%
ENGINE	.....2.0L TSI 16v 4-cyl turbo/intercooled, DOHC, chain-driven, var intake & exhaust, var valve lift; cast iron block, forged steel crank w five main bearings, alum alloy head/crossflow
HP/TORQUE	.....328 hp / 295 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.3:1
TRANSMISSION	.....7-spd DSG automatic
DRIVETRAIN	.....AWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, stblzr bar; R: multilink w coils, telescopic dampers, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....rack & pinion, elec pwr assist
BRAKES	.....F: 14.1 x 1.3 vented; R: 12.2 x 0.9 vented
WHEELS	.....19x8J alum alloy
TIRES	.....Hankook Ventus S1 ev03 235/35 R19 91Y summer performance
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....169.1 / 103.5 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....4.8 in
APPR / DEPART / BRKOVER	.....13.2 / 20.7 / 15.1°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....38.1 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....38.5 / 38.1 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.2 / 35.0 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....19.9 / 34.5 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3450 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....prem unl rec'd / 14.5 gal
MPG	.....22/31/25 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	.....\$47,100
EURO STYLE PKG:	solid roof replaces sunroof; titanium exhaust, manual driver's seat w power recline, delete front seat ventilation, diamond-pattern cloth seating w ArtVelours bolsters, padded door panels w ArtVelours inserts .....3795
MATS/LINER:	set of 4 Monster Mats, heavy duty trunk liner, VW CarGo Blocks .....296
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1225
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>.....\$52,416</b>

## 2025 VW GOLF LINEUP

<b>GOLF GTI</b>	241-hp 2.0L turbo/intercooled, 7-spd DSG, FWD
<b>Golf GTI S</b>	.....\$32,445
<b>Golf GTI SE</b>	.....37,420
<b>Golf GTI Autobahn</b>	.....40,880

<b>GOLF R</b>	328-hp 2.0L turbo/intercooled, 7-spd DSG, AWD
<b>Golf R</b>	.....\$47,100
<b>Golf R Black Edition</b>	.....48,415

More of anecdotal interest than comparative shopping interest, the Golf is very similar in a number of key dimensions to the otherwise seemingly quite different VW Tiguan also in this issue. Where it may actually become of comparative interest for some, there is notably less legroom in the back of the Golf, compared with the little SUV, but the ability to fold down the rear seat and expand cargo space in the Golf begs comparisons certain buyers may find worth a look.