

# The real deal.

BY JOE SAGE  
Product positioning brings a one-of-a-kind

Reverse spoiler alert: we had the VW Golf R in our prior issue and liked it so well, it went on our cover. Reviewing its evolution from more specialized versions like the R32, we had concluded that it is “a hot hatch that is sure to delight not just a narrow target audience, but many others, (delivering) purity of mission and execution, achieved with a simple purity of style and performance.” And this despite its lack of a coveted manual transmission.

Golf R is a standout in the hot hatch category—but wait, what’s this? A hot sedan? With a manual? And more affordable? Let’s have a look.

Much has been made of a supposed disappearance of sedans over recent years. On a closer look, this has mostly been defined by the Detroit brands (as much as anything, a nod to higher profits from SUVs, rather than any detriment of the sedan it-

self). But in fact, we’re surrounded by this vehicle type every day, so mainstream it’s almost invisible.

But a key subset flies higher—the sport sedan. And when piloting one, you notice others. You also perceive those others at a keener level, and for the most part, it is a quietly cooperative performance class, not a boy-racerish bunch.

As such, we had an especially good time piloting this particular Jetta—the GLI Autobahn.

VW’s Jetta has long had a mainstream position of its own. Its formula of content, format, reliability and price has made it a favorite, an easy choice for, say, an offspring’s first car, to head off to college. But the factors of its appeal can span generations well beyond this and last a lifetime.

Our sample, in sporty GLI form, was thoroughly enjoyable both as [a] a collective behind-the-wheel

experience and [b] when parsed point-by-point.

The new GLI has updated front and rear styling treatments complemented by new wheel options, with interior features including a revised display.

For reasons of volume, price points or both (not because it can’t be done, as they make all three), each version of Golf or Jetta comes with just one shift option. All Golfs (three trims of the 241-hp GTI and the 328-hp Golf R) come with a 7-speed direct-shift gearbox (DSG). For Jetta, four trims of the basic 158-hp powertrain all come with a mainstream 8-speed automatic. From there, Jetta steps ahead of the pack—the 228-hp GLI offers a choice (yes, a choice!) of 6-speed manual or the DSG.

Our Golf R did have AWD, enjoyable and practical, but perhaps necessary to offset front torque steer with its whopping 328 horses. At 228 horses, the Jetta GLI essentially doesn’t need it, and not having it keeps both weight and price down.

Despite lower horsepower than Golf R, Jetta GLI offers advantages many enthusiasts will salivate

over. It may be equal parts tough choice or no contest. The top Jetta GLI is roughly the same price as a base Golf, the top Golf R about \$15 grand more than either. We enjoyed our recent Golf R’s power and AWD cornering, but found the Jetta GLI still highly spirited (the Jetta GLI also weighs over 200 pounds less). And there’s that manual trans!

Best of all, the Jetta GLI manual does *not* have rev-matching (“blip-shifting”) to nurse the inexperienced, as on so many already-rare manuals from other brands lately. It just lets you drive it, truly manually, and how refreshing is that?!

Running through the boulevard grid and freeway ramps, applying aggressive acceleration in precision turns (along with precision manual shifts), any torque steer was just about completely negligible—remarkable for such a peppery front-driver (surely benefitting from VW corporate cousin brands that have engineered this out for years).

The Jetta GLI also has great stopping power, bearing the front brakes from not the newest but the prior Golf R, a very high spec on this, pro-rata.

Regardless of various spec comparatives and subjective emotional or driving preferences, there

is the objective difference of the Jetta, as a sedan, having a separate locking trunk for road trip luggage or urban cargo. (If you want to get more comprehensive, we compared Golf, Jetta and also VW Tiguan’s cargo volumes, finding considerable variety but also some overlap, what with seat-folding options and such. But it is still just the Jetta that has that separate, dedicated locking trunk.)

Less expensive and less extreme than Golf R, Jetta GLI presents a formula that will sort out its customers pretty easily—with several layers of variables, even atop the hatch/sedan alternative, easy for some and hard for others to choose.

The Jetta GLI is a highly refreshing entry overall—solid performance, priced in the \$30s, high fuel mileage, advanced suspension and brakes. And did we mention that glorious, non-blip-shifting manual transmission?

Speaking of VW corporate cousins, we were reminded throughout of S Audis from 20-25 years ago, but this is yours for half the price, even more-so counting all the inflation through those years.

This outwardly fairly unassuming VW performance sedan is a fine drive and a great deal. ■

## SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Puebla, México
ENGINE	.....2.0L TSI 16v 4-cyl transverse, turbo/intercooled, DOHC, chain-driven, var intake & exhaust, mntnce-free hydraulic lift; cast iron block, forged steel crank w five main bearings, alum alloy head/crossflow
HP/TORQUE	.....228 hp / 258 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.6:1
TRANSMISSION	.....6-speed manual (7-spd DSG also avail)
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: strut-type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, stblzr bar; R: multlink w coils, telescopic dampers, stblzr bar
STEERING	.....rack & pinion, elec pwr assist
BRAKES	.....F: 13.4 x 1.2 vented; R: 11.8 x 0.5 solid
WHEELS	.....18x7.5J alum alloy
TIRES	.....225/45 R18 91H all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....186.9 / 105.6 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....5.2 in
APPR / DEPART / BRKOVER	.....14.5 / 16.3 / 15.3°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....35.8 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....38.5 / 37.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.1 / 37.4 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....14.1 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....(manual) 3241 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg unl / 13.2 gal
MPG	.....(manual) 26/36/30 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	..... <b>\$32,715</b>
GLI HIGHLIGHTS INCL:	multi-link indep rear susp, lowered sport susp (-0.6 in vs base), DCC adaptive damping system, VAQ limited-slip diff, XDS diff, variable-ratio steering, drive mode select, Mk7 Golf R front brakes (incl)
PREMIUM PAINT: Monument Gray Uni	.....455
BLACK PKG: on GLI, adds black roof to black upper and lower grilles	.....650
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1225
TOTAL	..... <b>\$35,045</b>

Note: sticker price varies from info below.

## 2025 VW JETTA LINEUP

JETTA	.....FWD
158-hp 1.5L turbo/intercooled	.....8-AT
S	.....\$22,995
Sport	.....24,275
SE	.....25,775
SEL	.....29,500
JETTA GLI	.....FWD
228-hp 2.0L turbo/intercooled	.....(opt trans)
GLI Autobahn: 6-MT	..... <b>\$33,215</b>
GLI Autobahn: 7-DSG	.....\$33,215

## Compare: 2025 VW Golf Lineup

GOLF GTI	.....FWD
241-hp 2.0L turbo/intercooled	.....7-DSG
GTI S	.....\$32,445
GTI SE	.....37,420
GTI Autobahn	.....40,880
GOLF R	.....AWD
328-hp 2.0L turbo/intercooled	.....7-DSG
Golf R	.....\$47,100
Golf R Black Edition	.....48,415

