

Future thinking

AN EYE ON AN IMMINENT NEXT-GEN WITH NEW INTERFACE, LIKELY UPGRADES TO THIS ONE BY JOE SAGE

Refreshed for 2024 and with a new 2027 being teased, the 2026 Volkswagen Atlas, by definition, represents the state of the art.

Ours, in next-to-base trim level called "SE w/Technology" (or SE w/Tech) and front-wheel drive, is a three-row SUV for just \$43,730, second up of five trims from \$39,310 to \$54,630 (\$455 for Pure Gray paint was the only option on ours).

Given a tight price walk, we could be easily motivated by more features in other trims. A base SE (not "w/Tech") is \$39,310, so from there, if choosing between the two, staying FWD but going with

Tech adds \$4,320, while staying at base SE while going to AWD adds only \$1,900. At those prices and for the actual driving difference, we'd choose AWD every time. The only SE w/Tech feature we'd miss having is keyless entry, but that's a big one.

So now we're considering the full range. Notes during our week had several areas of interest that AWD might erase. We did not particularly notice torque steer, classically common in front-drivers (VW cousin Audi was perhaps the first to cleverly engineer it out). But we had instances of chirping when losing adhesion—entering fast traffic from

a side road, a right turn with strong acceleration (a common scenario), and even when the light turned green. Adhesion is easily worth \$1,900.

The green light chirp surprises us, having also noted a general lack of power, although the chirp may be a compensatory symptom. Or it could be a symptom of the auto-start system, bothersome in most vehicles, but here requiring a dive into the screen, as almost everything does in this.

Our notes on features and interfaces in general were many—semi-universal signs of the times, often influenced by EV development, which has had the lion's share of attention in many cases. VW seems to be such a case, as its screen dependency and touch implementations are much the

same as in our recent ID.4. This is discussed online by many. But what's important is—VW knows.

While we had this Atlas, they revealed the next Atlas (see at right). It's coming fast, along with the promise of a concerted effort to move away from the hugely screen-dependent interface. (Many may be watching for a good deal now on a '26, then an update—over-the-air, perhaps, or maybe physical buttons could be integrated into a new wheel or, more comprehensively, new console stack.

Atlas is strikingly handsome, solidly packaged and priced favorably. News that week also named VW as Europe's biggest selling brand. Maybe this reflects different sensibilities, or maybe they have a different interface—and no auto start-stop. The answers lie less in our experience now, more in the changes we have learned are imminent. ■

Our Atlas has all-season tires, good approach and departure angles, but not much breakover and only 6.3 inches of ground clearance. If any off-road or rally customizers have their eye on the Atlas, theirs may be just begging for a lift.



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Chattanooga, Tennessee
ROWS/SEATS	.....three / seven
BUILD	.....unitary constr, bolt-on front fenders, two solid-mounted subframes
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	.....Mexico / USA
PARTS CONTENT	.....US/Canada 59% / Mexico 32%
ENGINE	.....2.0L 4-cyl turbo/intercooled, DOHC, chain driven, 16v, mntnce-free hydraulic lifters, var intake-exhaust timing, var exhaust-valve lift, cast iron block, forged steel 5-bearing crankshaft, alum alloy crossflow head
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.6:1
HP/TORQUE	.....269 hp / 273 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	.....8-spd auto
DRIVETRAIN	.....FWD
SUSPENSION	.....F: strut type w lower control arms, coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar; R: multilink w coils, telescopic dampers, anti-roll bar
STEERING	.....elec pwr assist rack & pinion
BRAKES	.....F: 13.2 x 1.2 vented; R: 12.2 x 0.9 vented
WHEELS	.....20-in x 8J alum alloy
TIRES	.....255/50 R20 all-season
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....6.3 in
APPRCH / DEP / BRKOVER	.....20.8 / 21.3 / 17.8°
TURNING CIRCLE	.....40.0 ft
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....200.7 / 117.3 in
HEADROOM (F/2/3)	.....41.3 / 40.4 / 38.3 in
LEGROOM (F/2/3)	.....41.7 / 37.6 / 33.7 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....20.6 / 55.5 / 96.6 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....(FWD) 4317 lb
PAYLOAD	.....(FWD) 1102 lb
TOW CAPACITY	.....(FWD or AWD) 5000 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....reg unl / 18.6 gal
MPG	.....20/27/23 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE	.....\$43,730
PAINT: Pure Gray	.....455
DESTINATION CHARGE	.....1475
TOTAL	.....\$45,660

2026 VW ATLAS LINEUP

	FWD	AWD
SE	\$39,310	\$41,210
SE w/ Tech	▼ 43,730	45,630
Peak Edition SE w /Tech		48,060
SEL		49,620
SEL Premium R-Line		54,630

2026 VW ATLAS CROSS SPORT

	FWD	AWD
SE	\$38,300	\$40,200
SE w/ Tech	42,720	44,620
SEL		48,610
SEL R-Line		50,560
SEL Premium R-Line		53,620



Gen-two 2027 VW Atlas debuts at New York Int'l Auto Show

Just as we were experiencing the 2026 Volkswagen Atlas, VW was at the New York International Auto Show announcing—if not yet fully revealing—a new generation Atlas for 2027. As always, this will create opportunities for buyers of both the current and upcoming versions.

Here's what they had to say:

"When we first launched Atlas in 2017, we delivered the space and style the SUV market was missing; practical, well designed, and unmistakably Volkswagen," said VW of America president and CEO Kjell Gruner. "The all new 2027 Atlas brings more of what matters: a stronger design, smarter technology, increased power, and a premium feel where it matters most."

- Bolder design, smarter tech and new premium features
- All-new sheet metal
- A reimagined cabin, with real wood decor and ambient lighting standard
- 15-inch infotainment, Nappa leather and massaging front seats available
- Standard family-friendly features include power tailgate, rear sunshades, dual wireless charging and voice control
- New front center airbag
- Standard IQ.DRIVE driver assistance suite adds upgrades
- New MQB evo platform preserves spacious third row, generous cargo room
- Updated 2.0-liter EA888 Evo5 turbo-charged engine offers more power, with higher fuel economy anticipated

Stay tuned. ■