

2001.5 VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT

The 2001.5 Passat emerges with over 2,300 modifications. The only unchanged body parts are the roof and doors. New spot welding techniques have increased body stiffness by 10%. The Passat is still available as a four-door sedan and station wagon, in GLS and GLX trim lines. The 1.8-litre turbocharged Four develops an additional 20 horsepower. The front-wheel-drive Passat is available with either a four-cylindre or a V-6 engine and manual or automatic transmission. The all-wheel-drive 4Motion system is only available with the V-6 engine.

Inside

The doors open nearly 90 degrees to facilitate access. The very comfortable front seats have the German shape and firmness so appreciated on long drives. If they take their time, drivers eventually find an excellent driving position. The lever to slide the seat forward and back is beside the console. It should be on the outboard side or better yet, run the width of the seat. With the sunroof, head room is a bit tight for tall people.

The rear bench is as firm as the front seats and just as comfortable though the shape of the seat cushion may seem odd at first. There is room for two, with ample head and leg room for all but very tall people. With all-wheel drive, the bench loses its 60/40 split-fold feature but gains a ski pass-through.

As usual with VW, the trunk is cavernous. There are four tie-down hooks to anchor loose objects. The trunk is easy to load, with hinges on the outside that can't squash anything placed underneath. You have to be careful not to strike your head against the latch in the lid.

Convenience and safety

The cabin is impeccably finished. However, for a car in this price range, there is too much road noise, and too much engine noise in the four-cylinder version. Storage spaces are adequate but we've seen better in Volkswagen products. Though it took a while, Volkswagen has finally equipped the Passat with practical, versatile cup holders. Now they need to turn immediate attention to the ridiculously small centre console.

The automatic climate control is efficient but could be quieter. The more expensive versions can be equipped with a highly appreciated rain sensor, which adjusts wiper speed according to the intensity of precipitation. While on the subject, we might mention that the windshield wipers are poorly served by the washer nozzle location, under the edge of the hood where they can easily be blocked by snow. The antenna on the back of the roof can get in the way when you're loading things like skis, or a Christmas tree. On a positive note, the automatic locking system has a much more refined sound than before.

From a safety standpoint, this Passat is equipped with dual front and side air bags, five head restraints that lock only in the front seats, four-wheel anti-lock disc brakes, good headlamps, stability control, and good outward visibility except to the rear, because of the three rear head

restraints. There is a reflection from the top of the dash in the windshield, and the outside mirrors are very close to being too small.

Engine and transmission

The 1.8-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine develops 170 horsepower and 166 pound-feet of torque, which is 20 h.p. and 11 lb.-ft. more than before. These improvements, obtained by increasing turbocharger pressure by about two pounds, provide stronger acceleration and zippier passing. And as torque is constant, and at maximum, between 1,950 and 5,000 rpm, you can drive lazily and let the turbocharger do its thing. This also provides linear acceleration and is what makes this engine so pleasantly well adapted to the Passat. The engine meets ULEV (Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle) standards.

Smooth and quite quiet, the 30-valve, 2.8-litre V-6 develops 190 horsepower and 206 pound-feet of torque. It provides smooth, linear, palpable acceleration from almost any level. The more responsive accelerator improves what was sometimes qualified as laggard acceleration, but preferably, the accelerator should be smoother. This small gripe aside, the V-6 engine not only moves the Passat along smartly, it also contributes to the pleasant driveability and even meets LEV standards.

The manual gearbox is well-gearred, easy shifting and reasonably precise. The clutch is smooth and well-calibrated, i.e. neither too stiff nor too soft.

The five-speed automatic transmission generally shifts very smoothly during acceleration, but when slowing to a full stop, you can feel it downshift unpleasantly. Its Tiptronic function also allow you to select gears manually, which is fortunate because in automatic mode, the transmission can hesitate or be too quick to shift. That's because it has 240 gearshift patterns, which is 239 too many. The transmission adapts to your driving style, but only after the fact: drive slowly, and gearshifts are fast. Drive fast, and shifts are delayed. Even if you don't maintain you driving style, the transmission is always late, never shifting at the right time. Volkswagen should simply gear the transmission right and let you dictate when the transmission should shift with your right foot or the manual control.

On the road

Whether the roads ares straight or curvy, flat or bumpy, driving a Passat is sure to make you smile. The suspension feels reassuringly solid. This car is made for long hours of safe, comfortable driving. The Passat has the firm but compliant ride and, with the four cylinder engine, the well-balanced performance typical of a good touring sedan. Well-tuned power steering and powerful brakes round out the competent suspension.

As our inspection at the CAA-Quebec Technical Inspection Centre showed, the Passat is very well built, with a level of rust protection that allows Volkswagen (and Audi) to provide the longest corrosion warranty in the industry.

Conclusion

The new, improved Passat is well balanced, more comfortable and even more fun to drive. Generously equipped, it is an even better buy, especially in the four-cylinder GLS version. It's too bad that such a well-built car doesn't have a basic warranty at least equal to industry standards.

FOR

Driveability
Corrosion warranty
Smooth engines
Roominess
Comfort
Powerful brakes

AGAINST

Perfectible soundproofing
Small centre console
Poorly located windshield washer nozzles
Visibility when backing up
Limited basic warranty
Automatic transmission

2001.5 VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT

Engine: 20-valve, 1.8-litre turbo 4-cylindre;	30-valve, 2.8-litre V-6
Horsepower: 170 h.p. @ 5,900 rpm;	190 h.p. @ 6,000 rpm
Torque: 166 lb.-ft. @ 1,950 rpm;	206 lb.-ft. @ 3,200 rpm
Transmission: 5-speed man.; 5-speed auto.	Towing capacity: unavailable
Suspension: independent/semi-independent;	(wagon and 4Motion: fully independent)
Brakes: 4-wheel disc	Weight: 1,452 to 1,704 kg
Length: 470.3 cm (wagon: 468.2 cm)	Width: 174.6 cm
Height: 146.2 cm (wagon: 149.8 cm)	Wheelbase: 270.3 cm
Tires: P195/65R15; P205/55R15; P205/55R16	Air bags: standard dual front and side; head air bag optional

Fuel consumption:

- Transport Canada rating: city: 13.1 L/100 km (22 mpg); highway: 8.3 L/100 km (34 mpg)
- Test result: 12 L/100 (24 mpg)

Fuel tank capacity: 62 litres

Acceleration: 0-100 km/h: 8.5 seconds 60-100 km/h: 5.7 seconds

Competition: Honda Accord, Nissan Maxima, Subaru Legacy and Outback, Toyota Camry, Volvo S and V40, S60, V70 and XC

Maintenance (amount may vary from dealer to dealer):

Frequency: 8,000 km; total to 100,000 km: \$1,650

Warranty:

- Full basic coverage: 2 years/40,000 km
- Powertrain: 5 years/80,000 km

- Surface corrosion: 2 years/40,000
- Perforation damage: 12 years/unlimited mileage
- Emissions control system: 2 years/40,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module and onboard diagnostic device)

Factory replacement parts:

Rear bumper: \$710

Brake pads: \$186

Front fender: \$235

Front brake disk: \$138

Muffler: \$407

Average insurance premium (Quebec City, replacement cost endorsement, claim-free insurance record, female driver or male driver 30 to 40 years old): \$788 to \$1,278

Price according to trim line:

GLS sedan: \$29,550

GLS 4Motion sedan: \$37,180

GLX sedan: \$39,175

GLS 4Motion sedan: \$43,305

GLS wagon: \$30,725

GLS 4Motion wagon: \$38,355

GLX wagon: \$40,350

GLX 4Motion wagon: \$44,480

Main options:

V-6 engine: \$3,500

Luxury package: \$1,925 (GLS)

Climate package: \$450 (GLS)

Automatic transmission: \$1,230

Leather package: \$2,280 (GLS)

Head air bag: \$375

Price as tested: \$42,500 (GLX); \$30,000 (GLS)

Freight and preparation: \$830

Dealers: Quebec: 57; Canada: 167

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