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Correction: June 20, 2000 Photos of the Volkswagen Golf and Pontiac Aztek were reversed on the Auto pages for Saturday and Sunday. The correct photos appear on page B-5.

CAN'T GO WRONG WITH VW GOLF THE FUN, ZIPPY CAR WITH A SERIOUS TURBO ENGINE IS PRICED RIGHT

Kenn Peters Staff writer

It's cute, all right, this 2000 Volkswagen Golf, but what makes it even more endearing is the cushioned bottom line.

Right there, with the turbo engine and everything, the Golf tips in at \$20,045, including a \$525 destination charge and a bunch of other stuff. How can you go wrong?

Well, most likely you can't, unless, of course, you want a larger car. In that case you wouldn't even consider a 163-inch long Golf, the car VW sells tons of around the world.

The Golf is basically a fun car, but throw in the 150-horsepower turbo engine and it enters an entirely new realm. It becomes fun plus, a zippy car that can make a mockery of many more powerful cars.

The heart of the matter is VW's 150-horsepower turbo, an engine that does duty in several other VW autos, including the Beetle.

The standard engine in the Golf is a 115-horsepower 4-cylinder, but the turbo engine, with its 162 foot pounds of torque, becomes a serious matter when its mated to a car that weighs 2,785 pounds.

The downside to the turbo engine is the requirement to burn premium fuel, however, the Golf turns in 25 mpg in the city and 31 on the highway, and since the Golf's tank holds 14.5 gallons, you can see the situation becomes less acute.

VW has done with the Golf what it's done with its other cars, removed any trace of harshness from the 4-cylinder engine and dialed in a suspension system that seems to make road irregularities disappear before they can make themselves felt in the seat cushions.

At the same time VW has been able to engineer into this small car the kind of quietness that has become so typical of the rest of its line.

New this year is the optional (\$295) Monsoon sound system that utilizes eight speakers. It's a great stereo system all right, except there's one flaw; it's impossible to turn down the volume beyond a certain point, without turning it off.

Let's say the two people in the front want to turn the stereo down, but still maintain some volume, while they have a conversation.

Can't do it. The volume will go down to a point that's still too loud for conversation, but one more click of the volume dial and the volume goes off altogether.

Admittedly a lot of people won't be bothered by something VW obviously insists on in its stereos, which I consider to be a flaw.

The Golf has enough going for it to out-weigh any perceived fault.

How about 18 cubic feet of cargo capacity? Try that in any other car this size.

The extreme volume of luggage capacity is due to the Golf's square back design which opens up a huge area behind the rear seat. Folding the rear seat provides even more space.

Oh, there's one more thing VW does in the Golf that's a nice touch: It makes heated seats available in an optional \$150 cold weather package, without a requirement for leather seats, something most manufacturers don't do.

Consumers looking for value with an equal helpings of quality and fun need to check out the Golf.

Kenn Peters' Road Test appears every Sunday in the Herald American. You can reach him by e-mail at business@syracuse.com or by phone at (315) 470-2244.

VW Golf

Base price: \$17,900

Destination: \$525

Final price: \$20,045

Mileage: 24 city/31 highway

Wheelbase: 98.9 inches

Length: 163.3 inches

Weight: 2,767 pounds

Standard: Anti-theft alarm; premium AM-FM with 8 speakers; 1.8-liter turbo-charged engine; anti-slip regulation; anti-lock brake; daytime running lights; two years or 24,000 no charge maintenance; air conditioning; power windows; power mirrors; cruise control; front and side air bags

Options: Luxury package (\$1,175); cold weather package (\$150); Monsoon sound system (\$295)

Illustration: PHOTO

Courtesy of Volkswagen

VW's 1.8-LITER turbo-charged engine, turns this economy Golf into a high-spirited economy car. Price with options is \$20,045. Color.

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