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## GOING UPSCALE PAYS DIVIDENDS VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT HAS TAKEN ITS PLACE AMONG THE BEST IN MID-SIZE CATEGORY

Kenn Peters Staff Writer

It was ever so carefully that Volkswagen designed its new Passat, for the simple reason that the last Passat was a success story.

But redesign it VW did; in fact, VW says there are at least 2,300 changes from the last generation to the present. The results are pleasing to the eye and pleasing to drivers and passengers.

The changes moved the Passat from a car that may not have been taken seriously by many consumers to one considered by many to epitomize what cars in this class should be.

The suspension is tuned perhaps to the soft side so the Passat rides like a true mid-size sedan, but the handling is right on the money. After all, buyers shopping the competition, such as Toyota and Nissan, are looking for a car that rides well and has plenty of room.

The Passat has a generous amount of space in the front for driver and passenger, and especially in the rear for up to three passengers, although that's pushing it. As in any car, even the largest, two in the rear seat is comfortable.

The GLS is front-wheel drive, although VW's 4Motion is available. The GLS with the 1.8-liter turbo 4-cylinder delivers exhilarating performance.

The 4-cylinder, 20-valve engine idles smoothly, more like a 6-cylinder, and it delivers its power more like a 6-cylinder.

The turbo boost comes on quickly and smoothly, and this is important, without a hint of torque steer, or the natural ability of the engine to force a front-wheel drive car to one side during hard acceleration.

For drivers who find this important, the hustle from 0 to 60 mph will go by in less than eight seconds, perhaps a tick or two faster with the 5-speed standard transmission.

The 5-speed, by the way, is precise and smooth and adds an extra element of fun to the Passat.

Drivers who object to a turbo four will have to move into the 2.8-liter V-6 engine developing 190 horsepower.

Shoppers who haven't previously considered a VW need to take a minute to check them out. VW has moved the Passat decidedly upscale in typical Teutonic style, which is to say there is a lack of opulence but an abundance of comfort.

While the Passat's exterior underwent some obvious changes, the segue to the new design largely missed the interior, save for some small touches here and there, such as cupholders that were moved to the console between the seats.

The seats in the GLS had the optional partial leather trim package which includes seat heaters. The nice thing about VW heaters is that they have five settings to warm the backside.

Bad-weather driving shouldn't be an issue in the Passat because it's equipped with P195/65R 15 all-season tires.

Kenn Peters' Road Test appears Sunday in The Post-Standard. You can reach him by e-mail at [business@syracuse.com](mailto:business@syracuse.com) or by phone at (315) 470-2244.

Volkswagen Passat

Base price: \$21,750

Destination: \$550

Final price: \$25,675

Mileage: 22 city/31 highway

Wheelbase: 106.4 inches

Length: 185.2 inches

Weight: 3,225 pounds

Standard: 1.8-liter, 4-cylinder turbo engine; FWD with traction control and anti-slip regulation, and electronic differential lock; front and side air bags; side curtain protection; anti-lock brakes; 4-wheel disc brakes; air conditioning; power windows, door locks, mirrors; heated outside mirrors

Options: Leather package (\$1,500) includes: partial leather trim and heated front seats, heated windshield washer nozzles and multi-function steering wheel; Monsoon sound system (\$325); luxury package (\$1,550) includes: glass power sunroof, 15-inch alloy wheels and rear sunshade

Illustration: PHOTO<

Courtesy of Volkswagen<

THE VW Passat is a bona fide hit for the German automaker. The Passat is available with all-wheel drive. Color

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