

first drive

alpine pass



New Polo Dune international press presentation report

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The successor to the Polo Dune arrives here in April. We took an exclusive first drive of the new model in the French Alps

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Polo Dune all about the lifestyle; vibrant Lime and Magma Orange colours not for the UK; faux-SUV looks are attractive (main picture)



'The Polo. Now a little wilder.'
German marketing slogan says
it all. New Polo Dune
(or CrossPolo in Europe) aimed
at style-conscious young buyers
with active lifestyles

Nice, France, 13:00 26.01.06

Deadly silence. At 6000ft in the French Alps, the air is cold and still, and you'd better hope that any lone skiers don't ignore you if you run into trouble. Volkswagen recently presented the new Polo Dune to a hungry contingent of international journalists high in the unforgiving mountains, at the Isola 2000 ski resort, 85km north of Nice. And ignoring it is precisely what they don't want; in the niche-within-a-niche supermini 'lifestyle' market, sales (however small) are to be had. In this respect the old model scored well, with over 300 sold in the UK. Europe fared better still, where as the Polo Fun, three times the projected sales were achieved. This time around the UK market is expected to take around 400 in the first year of production, and as the new model is largely identical to old one, that projected tally seems fair.

On sale in the UK in April, it is one car that (like its predecessor) defies you to ignore it. With its faux-SUV styling and silver body adornments, the overall effect is striking – exactly what the marketers wanted, as this Polo is all about the lifestyle. 'The Polo. Now a little wilder.' is how the new car is marketed in Germany. The advertising campaign depicts a young, active, and trendy couple driving the car to their various sporting events, and young trendy town dwellers seem to be the targeted audience.

Called 'CrossPolo' in Europe (there are to be similar jacked-up 'CrossGolf' and 'CrossFox' versions of other Volkswagen models too), the Dune name was chosen for the UK, to build on the 'heritage' and familiarity of the model introduced in 2004. Mechanically near-identical to the regular Polo, the new version of the Dune features the same body addenda as fitted to the previous car. Sitting

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15mm higher than the rest of the range (due to a raised ground clearance kit available to Polo drivers in Europe), the Dune is fitted with 17" BBS 'Radial Spoke' alloy wheels with 215/40 ZR 17 tyres. Resolutely two-wheel drive, the UK market will get a two-engine range. Both

1.4s, the petrol model develops 74bhp, while the three-cylinder TDI develops 69bhp. Interestingly, the European market is offered a full-fat five-engine range, starting with a 64bhp 1.2, and rising to a 99bhp TDI.

The brief drive we had showed that the 1.4 TDI is still an endearing unit, with its three-pot thrum encouraging spirited driving. All the engines available here and on the continent are proven Polo units, and should do the job ►



New Polo Dune body kit includes silver roof rails, door mirrors, front foglights and body cladding



◀ adequately for most potential owners. As before, the new Polo Dune drives competently, and although the extra ride height makes itself known, it is not really that much of an issue. Yes, the Dune doesn't feel as surefooted as a regular Polo, but it can still be hustled around tight alpine passes, as was very ably demonstrated by a pair of very speedy German journalists! The ride is firm but seemed all-absorbing despite the low, large-profile tyres, and the steering is well-weighted, if short of feel.

The cabin is insulated well from engine and wind noise, and is a very comfortable place to be. UK cars will do without the extrovert Orange or Lime fabrics seen on the photographic cars and will be trimmed in grey. Why? The Lime and fantastic new Magma Orange paint colours are not coming to these shores, as we are seen as a nation of more conservative buyers. As with the previous model, Black Magic Pearl Effect, Flash Red, Raven Blue, and Reflex Silver will be offered to the UK market. The Raven Blue paintwork on the cars we tested looked good and contrasted well with the lower body plastic add-ons. But, why limit the colour range on a car which is supposed to be a lifestyle vehicle? Other scribes found the issue of colour specification strange too, stating that the continental-only shades were the best and most striking of them all. It's a shame, as of all the colours available, the Magma Orange suited the car best, and I'll bet that it hasn't done sales of the new Ford Focus ST any harm...

Special interior trim includes chrome-plated instrument surrounds, alloy pedals, perforated leather steering wheel and handbrake grip, branded gear knob, and front sports seats with side nets for oddments. Standard equipment includes MP3 CD player, ESP, semi-automatic air conditioning, electric windows front and rear, multifunction computer, and a full complement of airbags. And it's all done with the usual solid Polo build quality.

Available as a five-door only, prices start at £12,645 for the 1.4-litre petrol car, and rise to £13,495 for the TDI-engined version. Which is best? The TDI unit seemed to suit the car well, and was only caught out on the steep inclines leading up to the snow-covered chalets. It's a surprise then, that Volkswagen UK predict that the 1.4 petrol variant will be the best-seller for the UK market.

Some observers would argue why build a car like the Dune at all? In a very limited niche market it surely makes no sense? Well, a sale is a sale after all, however small, and in this modern world of offering something for everyone, this author at least applauds VW for making this visually rugged version of the Polo. The style and trim is eye-catching and different, and as the weather turned, the newcomer looked equally at home on the boulevard at Nice, as it did in the ski resorts of the Alps. Yes, it is more expensive than lesser Polos with the same engines, but as is nearly always the case, style comes at a price. **VWPR**

specifications

Model Polo Dune 1.4/1.4 TDI

Price £12,645/£13,495

Displacement (cc) 1390/1422

Power output 74bhp @ 5000rpm/69bhp @ 4000rpm

Maximum torque 92lb ft @ 3800rpm/
114lb ft @ 1600rpm

Fuel system Electronic multi-point injection/
direct injection turbocharger with intercooler

Transmission Five-speed manual gearbox

Top speed (mph) 103/100

0-62mph (seconds) 14.3/15.9

Brakes Dual-circuit system with ventilated discs
(front), self-adjusting drums (rear), and ABS

Wheels 7.5J x 17" BBS 'Radial Spoke' alloy

Tyres 215/40 ZR 17

Unladen weight (kg) 1087/1155

Dimensions (l/w/h mm) 3925/1671/1499

On sale in the UK 14 April 2006