

Whatever next?



Ian Lamming test drives the new VW Golf GTE

AS motorists we have become spoilt children, brattish even.

The more the automotive manufacturers give us the more we expect and the less appreciative we become. The car maker-customer relationship is one of unconditional love and it only works one way.

Even modestly priced cars now come loaded with features once the preserve of the rich and privileged.

It started with power steering, central locking and electric windows, then anti-lock brakes and airbags. Now most cars drip with radar linked brakes to stop you crashing, eyes on the road cameras in case you wander out of your lane and features that will steer for you if you like.

It's so hard to be impressed nowadays because we have seen it all, done it all and driven it all.

But VW has managed to keep a few tricks up its corporate sleeve and while you would normally associate the moniker GTE with another brand beginning with V it is left to the Germans to spring it on the world – and its fab.

GT is bound to be sporty then and the E denotes electric motor. So this particular Golf is a stunning hybrid – plug in if you can be bothered – that offers incredible performance, economy and emissions, or at least lack of them.

First the worthy bit. The motor is a modest 1.4 litre but being turbocharged

offers great performance in its own right.

The electric motor means the overall figures become staggeringly clean and frugal. The CO2 figure is just 39 when both motors work together, zero when it goes all EV. The combined fuel figure is 166mpg; I know, stupendous. So there are all sorts of tax windfalls and benefits to the ice caps.

But, for me, more importantly, it is the way the GTE drives that matters, which is every bit as good as a GTI. The chassis and steering are peerless, the sprint ability and power delivery are staggering, the ability to stop quickly breathtaking. It's every driver's dream. There is power right across the range from amazing acceleration from rest, thanks to the instant delivery of the electric motor, to incredible mid-range and top end as both motors forge an alliance. So it will sprint, cruise, hill-climb and overtake to your heart's content.

It looks GTI-like, all sporty and purposeful, except the associated red piping has been replaced with blue – see what they did there?

Being a Golf it is a superb practical family car as well with decent boot, great accommodation for driver and passengers and bags of spec.

For the moment I am content, like a child left sitting in the wrapping after ripping open Christmas presents, but what about tomorrow? Now VW, what can we expect next?

Fact File

- VW Golf GTE
- Engine: 1.4 petrol turbo with plug-in electric motor
- Combined power: 204PS
- 0-62mph: 7.6 secs
- Top speed: 138mph
- Combined miles per gallon: 166
- Transmission: six speed auto DSG
- Insurance: 26E
- CO2 g/km: 39