



Flying the Flag

Ian Lamming drives SEAT's understated hot hatch

Fact File

SEAT Leon Cupra
280 DGS-auto
Engine: 2.0
Power: 280PS
0-62mph: 5.7 secs
Top speed:
155mph
Combined miles
per gallon: 42.8
Transmission:
DSG-auto
CO2 g/km: 154

WHAT? No whale-tail. No road-skimming airdam. No sheep-swallowing bonnet scoops. I thought this car was supposed to be fast?

At a glance, all that sets the latest Cupra apart from normal Seat Leon's is a tiny chequered flag on the boot and a tasteful set of 19in alloys; it really is that understated.

Those people really in the know might spot slightly modified front and rear ends but the changes are subtle. Otherwise the microscope might reveal a 280 printed somewhere and the model name in five silver letters on the back.

The overall effect is minimal, mild and modest, which is strange given that everything else about this car isn't.

Until you drive Cupra 280 you would simply never guess what is about to explode into your consciousness. Yes, the '280' does mean 280PS from the 2.0 litre TSI engine. That's more than enough to hit warp speed – try 0-60mph in 5.5 seconds, then lift off before the ubiquitous speed van nabs you.

It is awesome, really. There is just so much power when you need it; that neck-snapping, ballistic thrust that you only get with a turbo – and, perhaps, a supercharger, or reheat.

Making life even sweeter is the fact that on the other end of all that power is the sweetest gearbox known to man, woman, boy and girl, the DSG. It flicks up and down the ratios in break-neck speed. It's the nearest thing humble drivers will get to driving an F1 car.

The exhilaration is transmitted through the chunky leather steering wheel and, of course, your pants and it is complemented perfectly by the super chassis, which performs miracles by getting all that power to the road in a clinical and sophisticated manner.

It is smooth running, agile and a confidence-inspiring ride, that's for sure.

More remarkable still is that if you drive Cupra like a normal Leon, you will get normal Leon fuel figures – and mpg in the 40s.

Inside? Well it's a Seat so expect black on a black background and you won't be disappointed, but the sports seats are brilliant and the touch screen controls a nice modern feature.

So that's the Seat Leon Cupra. It may be understated but it is not a car to be under-estimated.