

WORLD Car Of The Year

THE BASIC RECIPE REMAINS THE SAME – CLEVER DESIGN, STRONG MECHANICALS
AND GREAT DRIVING DYNAMICS AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE



It is a trophy any car-maker would love to have on their mantel and this year it belongs to the Volkswagen Golf.

WORDS BY PETER ATKINSON

There is nothing surprising about the popular VW taking out the world car of the year gong, after all, it is one of the most respected and biggest-selling cars on the planet, built by one of the world's biggest car-makers. But what is remarkable is the fact that this latest iteration of the Golf, generation number six in the family, is a relatively mild evolution of the previous model, which in turn was not all that different from the model before it. In fact, the Golf has not changed all that dramatically since it first rolled off the production line way back in 1974 – yes, 35 years and 26 million VW Golfs ago. Sure, the technology has changed during that time but the basic recipe remains the same – clever design, strong mechanicals and great driving dynamics at an affordable price.

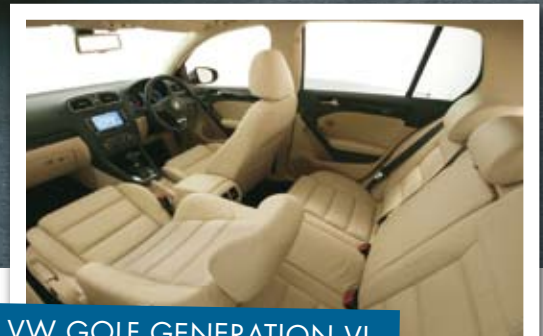
The fact that the latest Golf has been judged the world's best car is a powerful statement about the value of making something very good and then making it a bit better year after year, model after model. Like its German compatriot the Porsche 911, the Golf's development has been about evolution, rather than revolution. A safe formula, perhaps, but if those two cars are any example it is a theory more manufacturers should adopt.

So what is it about the latest edition of the Golf that has won over the hearts and votes of 59 of the world's leading motoring writers? Certainly VW has forged new ground with its engine technology, particularly in its petrol-powered models and the remarkable 1.4 litre TSI "twin charged" powerplant,

which has also won accolades as the world's best. Taking a small-capacity four-cylinder engine and adding not one but two power-boosting devices has produced a truly impressive engine. On one hand there is a supercharger – a mechanically-driven pump that forces a fuel and air mixture into the engine, giving it a low-down boost from the minute you push the throttle. Once the engine builds up some revs, that responsibility switches to a turbo-charger, which uses momentum produced by exhaust gases to force-feed the engine. The end result is a small engine that jumps off the line smartly and accelerates like a much bigger engine, while still maintaining its frugal consumption.

The TSI will be offered in two forms in the Golf – a 90kW engine in the \$25,990 entry-level model (6.3l/100km) and a sporty 118kW version. There is also a two-litre turbo-diesel, with 103kW and using just 5.3/100km, rounding out the Golf range. Presently, it is available in two trim levels – entry-level Trendline and top-spec Comfortline with a high-performance GTI to join the range later.

We tested all three variants of the Golf, featuring a seven-speed dual-clutch DSG semi-automatic transmission in the petrol models and six-speed DSG transmission in the torquier diesel. The DSG dual-clutch transmission, a highly efficient marvel of modern technology that is quicker and uses less fuel than a manual, has been further refined for this new model. It makes the Golf a surprisingly fun car to drive, particularly when the transmission is in sport mode, while still offering the economy and



VW GOLF GENERATION VI

HOW BIG? A compact hatch, but with ample room for a small family.

HOW FAST? The super-quick GTI model is yet to arrive, but the 1.4l TSI engine produces staggering performance for such a small and frugal thing.

HOW THIRSTY? Consumption in the diesel is just 5.3l/100km (combined), while the petrol TSI is almost as efficient at 6.3l/100km.

HOW MUCH? Starting from \$25,990, although the top-spec model and options can push it beyond \$40,000.

low emissions demanded in the modern age.

Another big step forward in the new Golf has been in the suspension with the addition of optional active chassis control (\$1500) – an electronic system that allows you to choose the way the car rides and handles with the press of a button, from a supple "comfort" ride to a sharp-handling "sport" mode.

Optional park assist, which is VW's clever sensor technology that allows the car to automatically reverse-park itself (\$1400) is another brilliant initiative. These options, plus satellite navigation (\$3000) can push the price of the top-end Golf beyond \$40,000, which is getting into BMW territory. But then again, you are buying the world car of the year. **CL**