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2009 Volkswagen Tiguan

Small in size, big in personality.



BY CAMERON NAISH JUN 5, 2008



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Boulder, Colorado — With a faint swish from the 200-horsepower turbo engine and crisp, responsive handling, it is easy to forget that the new VW Tiguan is an SUV.

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As the compact SUV market continues to grow, so do the vehicles. Volkswagen is now entering the market with a car that is practical, innovative, fun and actually still compact.

While the Tiguan may be small in size, it is big in personality. The name itself is a great conversational topic ("Tiguan" is a mix of the words "tiger" and "iguana"), and the VW comes with a variety of standard features such as stability control, satellite radio and ABS.

The car also features some options with each trim level (S, SE and SEL) that the competition does not, including a panoramic sunroof that stretches across the entire roof of the car, plus heated seats and dual-zone climate control. One of the most entertaining options is a touch-screen audio and navigation system. It has a 30GB harddrive that allows the driver to store multiple songs to the car itself as well as an MP3 player connection. The only downside to the stereo is how quickly it pumps out static; the sound quality drops significantly once the dial is turned to the halfway point and up.

No option is as important as how the car drives, and that is where the Tiguan shines. While the other vehicles in the segment feel like SUVs, the VW is different; it is downright fun. It handles well, responds quickly and does not suffer from body roll. While any SUV can get a person to the mountains with a snowboard and tons of gear or get the kids to soccer practice on time, this car gets people to their destinations with smiles on their faces.

The vehicle is powered by a 2.0-liter turbocharged engine (that likes to drink premium fuel) that comes from the VW GTI hatchback. It may not break any speed records, but it goes from zero to 60 mph in 7.8 seconds with the 6-speed automatic transmission. A 6-speed manual transmission is also available, but VW's 4Motion AWD system is available only with the automatic.

Even with a peppy engine and automatic transmission, the Tiguan achieves adequate fuel economy. It has an estimated 17 mpg for city and 24 mpg for highway.

The Tiguan's exterior styling is an interesting blend of the Touareg and GTI. The interior is comfortable, quiet and roomy, especially with the sliding rear seats. There is 23.8 cubic feet room of cargo room in the back, and 56.1 with the rear seats folded down.

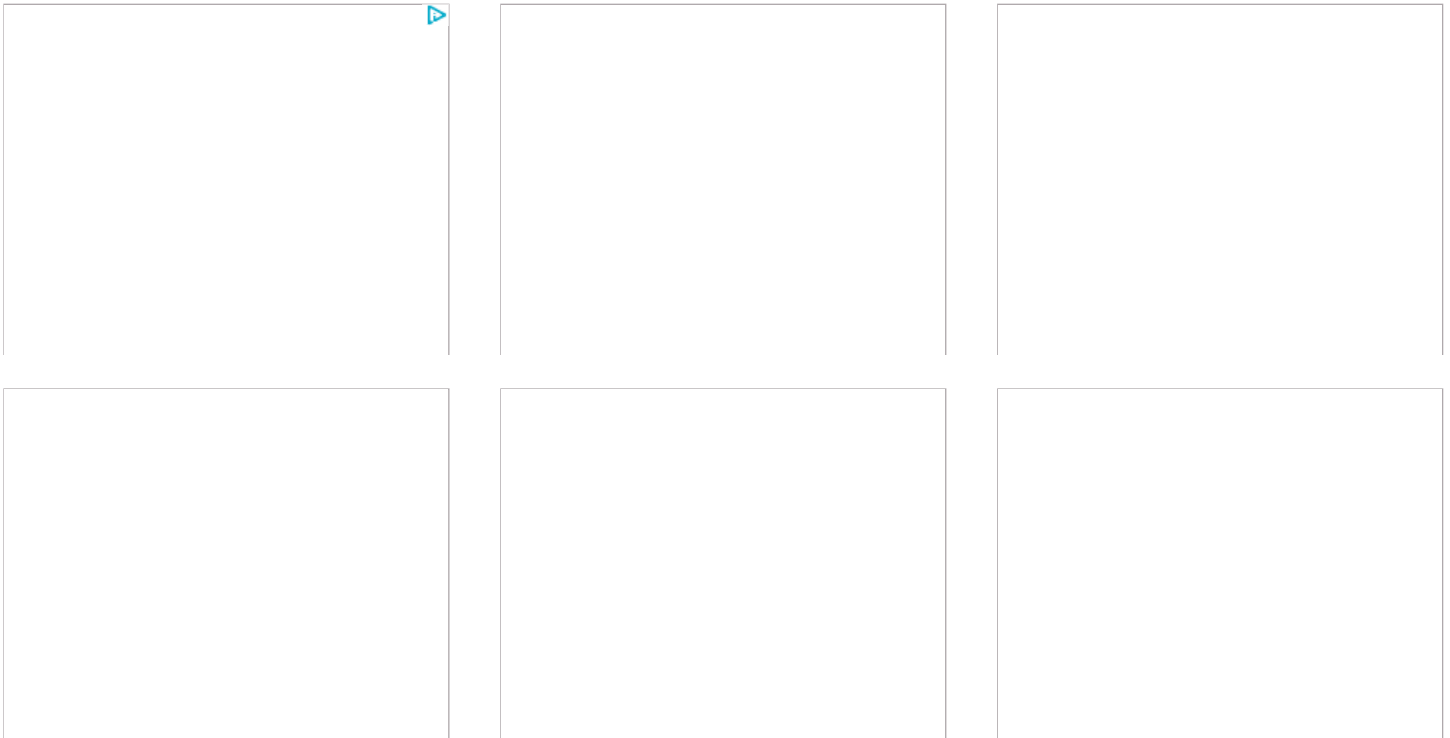
The engineers put effort into detail with tight seams, high-quality plastics and small VW emblems inside the headlight housings, but they dropped the ball when designing the seatbelt buckles; they are too high and awkward. The blinkers are also a bit too quiet, and after doing a lane change it is easy to accidentally leave them on.

Even though there is some room for improvement, the Tiguan is a well designed compact SUV, and each trim level has its unique style. As each trim level increases, so does the size of the Tiguan's rims (16 in. to 18 in.) and the total amount of chrome around the car.

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