



Stylish Affordability

It's easy to love the 2011 Volkswagen Jetta SE

BY ERIC TEGLER

IS IT NECESSARY to pay more than \$25,000 for a dash of automotive style? Cars like the new Volkswagen Jetta prove that style and a premium feel can be had for less. With base prices starting at \$15,995, the smartly redesigned Jetta is actually cheaper than its predecessor.

Volkswagen accomplished this by shrewdly trimming content. The new Jetta eschews features like power-reclining seatbacks, multi-mode stability control (single-mode stability control remains), rear disc brakes, a gas-strut hood, and soft-touch interior materials. Save for the last deletion, potential Jetta customers won't miss much, but they will take note of the car's handsome new exterior, increased size, and practicality.

The "melted butter" shape of the previous-generation Jetta has been replaced by one with more defined profile lines and a

new grille. The effect is almost Audi-like, suggesting style beyond the Jetta's price point. Nearly three inches longer than the previous model, the 2011 Jetta offers more leg room and comfort, especially for rear-seat passengers. Moreover, the increased size of the new Jetta provides more shoulder room, and the V-Text leatherette seating surfaces are appealing.

WEB EXCLUSIVE 
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Volkswagen Jetta SE
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— E.T.



Despite the alterations to the suspension (torsion beam) and rear brakes (drums), the driving experience of the 2011 Jetta remains largely the same as the previous model – which is to say it's pleasurable. The Jetta SE, available with either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmission, features a 170 hp 2.5-liter, five-cylinder engine (one of four engine choices, including a 2.0-liter turbo-diesel). The 2.5 provides adequate power, but I needed to downshift on a couple of uphill highway grades to maintain pace.

Taking direct aim at the Toyota Corolla, Honda Civic, and Ford Fiesta, the 2011 Jetta offers a size advantage and, arguably, stylish affordability.



INTELLIGENT RESPONSE

The 2011 Volkswagen Jetta comes standard with a safety feature VW previously reserved for its most expensive models: the Intelligent Crash Response System (ICRS). Unique to Jetta, the system actually comes into play just after airbags deploy. Once the severity of the crash is detected and airbags are deployed, the ICRS automatically unlocks all doors, disconnects the battery, shuts off the fuel supply, and turns on the warning hazard lights. Intelligent engineering indeed.

THE SPECS

2011 Volkswagen Jetta SE

Price as Tested: \$22,130

Engine: 170 hp, 2.5-liter five-cylinder

Weight: 3,082 pounds

Fuel Economy: 24 city/31 highway

Comparison Shopping

The combination of a lethargic economy and volatile energy prices over the past 24 months has led car buyers to consider more cost-effective and energy-efficient vehicles. Manufacturers are now responding with a host of less-expensive, more-efficient offerings, with a renewed emphasis on technology and style.



2011 MAZDA 2 TOURING

Though it shares a platform with the Ford Fiesta, the Mazda 2 is tuned for sportier responses and has a more youthful style. Despite having less horsepower than the Fiesta, the lighter Mazda 2 feels sprightlier. The vehicle offers a more balanced blend of practicality and fun than other cars in this class, but it lacks the sophisticated tech of some Bluetooth-equipped competitors.

Price as Tested: \$16,185

Engine: 100 hp, 1.5-liter I4

Weight: 2,306 pounds

Fuel Economy: 29 city/35 highway



2011 VOLKSWAGEN TOUAREG HYBRID

Volkswagen's supercharged Hybrid Touareg, with its top speed of 149 mph and combined 23 mpg, is a statement. The Touareg sports an attractive new exterior, a sumptuous interior, and several tech advancements — from a “3-D view” navigation system to the ability to coast in electric mode at speeds up to 99 mph.

Price as Tested: \$60,565

Engine: 380 hp, supercharged 3.0-liter V6/hybrid

Weight: 5,135 pounds

Fuel Economy: 21 city/25 highway