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review

(read here first)

1) Front blurb

You don't need to read the front blurb if you don't want to. It's useful background information that many people find entertaining.

2) Your selected review

The first four lines tell you whether or not you should buy this vehicle:

Quick Summary

How Reliable?

How Safe?

Overall rating

The rest of the review simply tells you why we came up with those ratings. You can carefully read the rest of the information such as "What Goes Wrong" or simply take our word for it. For a better explanation of our reviewing system – just click on the link below:

<http://www.dogandlemon.com/media/General%20Comments%20PDF/How%20to%20use%20these%20reviews.pdf>

Or, if you're reading this on a printed page, go to our website dogandlemon.com, click the 'get your copy' icon on the front page, then you'll see a list of articles on the right hand side of your screen. Click on 'General Comments', then 'How to use these reviews'.

3) Additional information

Inside the reviews we often refer you to useful additional articles listed under the headings 'General Comments' or 'Safety'. These, and dozens of other free articles, are included in a page of links that follow the review. You merely have to click on the name of the article in this page of links to go to it.

The last page contains useful additional information on things that go wrong with many vehicles. Many people find this useful, many others don't understand it and simply ignore it. That's okay. **Enjoy.**

Volkswagen

Adolph Hitler admired Henry Ford. Adolph's dream, like Ford's, was to put a car in every driveway.

Hitler's fantasy car had to drive around 100kms on 7 litres of petrol, it had to cruise at 100km/h and sell for around 990 Deutschmarks, a figure calculated on the average savings of the typical German working man.

The German motor industry of the time was set up to provide quality cars for the wealthy and they thought Hitler's idea was mad; it seemed inconceivable that a car could be made cheap enough for the working classes, and they politely evaded and delayed.

Finally Hitler gave up and decided to build the damned car himself. KdF, a branch of the Nazi German Labour Front (DAF) put up the dough and Hitler hired noted car designer Dr. Ferdinand Porsche to make it real.

Porsche had a ten month deadline that actually stretched into four years.

The new vehicles were officially called KDFs, but were quickly renamed *Volkswagens*, or 'people's cars'. Meanwhile, the KDF workers bought little five-Deutschmarks stamps every week and pasted them into books. After four years, when each worker had paid his 990 Deutschmarks, a new Volkswagen would be his, or so he was promised.

However, the people's car was merely one small part of Hitler's globalization strategy, and Hitler's neighbours objected.

Germany's new Volkswagens were rather too similar to an existing Czechoslovakian vehicle called the *Tatra*, and



the Tatra's makers sued. Hitler solved the problem by invading Czechoslovakia.

A few Volkswagens were built before the war and the nation looked on in awe, but not a single vehicle was ever sold to the public.

Within milliseconds of war being declared, Hitler's 'people's car' underwent an astonishing transformation. Production of the Volkswagen 'beetles' suddenly halted, replaced by 55,000 *Kubelwagens*, the military vehicles that were the predecessors of the VW dune buggies.

At the end of World War II the invading Russians pinched all the US\$67million that KdF had gathered from its workers. The Russians figured that the money amounted to \$3.35 for each of the 20 million of their people killed in the war. Not one German worker ever received a car in return for his savings.

After the war the Americans took reluctant control of the bombed-out factory, then handed the whole factory town over to the British. It was an Englishman, Major Ivan Hirst, who ensured the future of Volkswagen. Hirst supervised the restarting of the assembly lines and the British helped get the factory back in operation, not to produce cars, but as a maintenance depot for the British military vehicles.

The workers, in the meantime, gathered what resources they could and produced a small and patchy range of VW cars to trade for food and raw materials, both of which were in extremely short supply.

The British offered the factory to the leaders of the English car companies, all of whom laughed. The Ford Motor Company wouldn't take Volkswagen even for free. Finally Volkswagen was returned to the Germans, under the leadership of Heinz Nordoff.

The early VW models were shockers; perched on high, skinny tyres, they were underpowered and needed to be hand cranked on cold mornings. There was no gas gauge. Oh, and the doors blew off if you got too close to a pass

-ing bus. However, they offered cheap and basic transport at a time when cars of any kind were scarce.

Gradually the factory was organised and production doubled every year for the next three years. By 1950 over 80,000 were produced.

Much of VW's success was built on the popularity of Beetles in America. At first the American public, wildly in love with gas-guzzling monsters, laughed at the Beetles. Further, the memories of World War II were still fresh in the minds of the US people, who hated anything associated with Hitler. However, West Germany was home to thousands of American troops, many of whom drove captured Volkswagens and who spread the word when they returned to the USA.

The VW Beetle may seem quaint these days, but in the early 1950s it was one of the few reliable small cars available in America. Bit by bit old ladies, poor university students and librarians adopted the VW Beetle as their car of choice. During Volkswagen's boom years in the U.S., there was a long waiting list for VW Beetles.

Success did not last long. Although the Beetle range was continually updated, it had been designed before World War II and was showing its age. Gradually the Beetle range was improved, but not fast enough. An attempt to repackage the Beetle in a new form – the *Type III Variant* – was considered a failure despite hundreds of thousands being sold. This is because the designers failed to address the real problems associated with the Beetle, such as poor handling, noise and exhaust fumes that often flowed into the cab when the heater was turned on.

In 1964, Volkswagen bought *Auto Union* (later to become Audi). Although Auto Union factories were put to work assembling Beetles, it was the Audi connection which eventually led to the first real change in the VW range since the 1930s.



VOLKSWAGEN

Official name: Volkswagen AG

Owned by: mostly Porsche (35.14% – probably soon to be 51%), State of Lower Saxony (20.75%), plus public shareholding.

Owns:

- Audi (100%)
- Bentley (100%)
- Bugatti (100%)
- Lamborghini (100%)
- MAN (30%)
- Scania (20%)
- Seat (100%)
- Škoda (100%)

plus joint ventures in China and elsewhere.

Current situation: The Volkswagen group is the world's fourth largest – and Europe's largest – carmaker. VW is aggressively expanding into China. Although VW is currently profitable, profit margins are generally thin. VW-group sales are growing, but VW-branded cars are losing share in the crucial European & American markets. VW quality is poor, even by European standards, and VW is vulnerable to losing market share to Eastern makes. VW is currently facing a takeover by Porsche. Porsche recently persuaded the European courts to overturn a German law prohibiting just such a takeover.

Chances of survival: okay.

Volkswagen is too big to be allowed to fall even if things turn to custard in both China and the USA. However, VW is vulnerable to both economic downturn and loss of market share to Eastern makes, so major restructuring seems certain for the future •

Despite attempts to modernise it, the Beetle was finally killed off in America when the US Government brought in heavy pollution controls. The VW engines, which were basically unchanged since 1934, simply couldn't hack it. Thus, the original Volkswagens ceased to exist in most of the world by the early 1970s, although they were still produced in Mexico until quite recently.

By the 1970s Volkswagen was in serious financial trouble, but with commendable insight the company was bailed out by the Lower Saxony government.

The 1974 VW Golf – which was cloned off the BMC Mini but based on an Audi company design – helped Volkswagen remain one of Europe's leading car companies.

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However, Volkswagen quality is poor, even by European standards, and VW is vulnerable to losing market share to Eastern makes.

Although VW is currently profitable, profit margins are thin. VW-group sales (e.g., Audi & Bentley) are growing, but VW-branded cars are losing share in crucial markets. Volkswagen has lost billions in America and currently faces a seemingly impossible task of selling more vehicles into a failing market. It seems likely that VW will soon pull the plug on its American venture.

VW is currently facing a takeover by Porsche. Porsche recently persuaded the European courts to overturn a German law prohibiting just such a takeover. Porsche wants to streamline and reform Volkswagen, so major restructuring seems certain for the future •

Red / Bora / Caddy / Jetta / Touran current models



GOLF



CADDY



BORA / JETTA



TOURAN

• For pricing & model info, see below

Quick Summary

Nice cars, often let down by poor reliability and high servicing costs.

How Reliable?

Dodgy. See 'what goes wrong' below

How Safe?

Excellent. See our safety summary below

Overall Rating:

NOT recommended

ALSO CONSIDER: (Golf / Bora / Jetta) a Toyota Corolla, Honda Civic, a Subaru Legacy, a Mazda3 or Mazda6. (Caddy) A Hyundai iLoad, or any Japanese station wagon. (Touran) Mitsubishi Grandis.



How Much?



New around \$38,000–\$68,000, including GST



Depends on age, mileage & condition. See our devaluation guidelines in the links page after this review



How Much?



New around \$25,000–\$59,000, including GST



Depends on age, mileage & condition. See our devaluation guidelines in the links page after this review

SUB MODELS: The Caddy is a light commercial van built around the main bits of the Golf. The Jetta is just a Golf with a boot. It's the sedan version, produced originally for the American market, because Americans can't seem to get their heads around the idea of a hatchback, and the Golf is a hatchback. Details @ volkswagen.co.nz or volkswagen.com.au



General blurb

• First read our blurb for the previous Golf version:

1999-04 Golf

Volkswagens are seen through different eyes depending on which country you live in. In Europe, models like the Golf are seen in the same light at the Honda Civic – mainstream, well-built cars that aren't exciting, but have a good reputation.

Outside of Europe, cars like the VW Golf are seen as vaguely exotic yuppie cars, one step above the mainstream Eastern models like Honda & Toyota.

Both perceptions are complete nonsense: the perception that Volkswagens are either exotic or well built is simply rubbish. In the majority of surveys of both reliability and customer satisfaction, Volkswagens hover somewhere in the bottom half. Half the problem is the fact that Volkswagens aren't very well built. The other half of the problem is that Volkswagen relies on complicated, unproven high technology that often can't survive real-world conditions. This is all the more outrageous when you consider that buyers often pay a premium price for Volkswagen cars.

New Volkswagen Golfs are bad enough; old Volkswagen Golfs are simply dreadful, and parts and servicing are often very, very expensive.

The Golf is also sold, in different forms, as the Golf MPV, Vento saloon, Vento coupé, VW Beetle, Audi A3, Audi TT coupé and roadster & Seat Toledo. The Škoda Octavia is basically the same car, slightly stretched, and built much better than the Golfs.

If you exclude reliability, then the Golf is a pretty practical vehicle in all of its forms. On the road the Golf offers good comfort and a sensible driving position; even budget models offer a pleasing round town drive and reasonable performance. Golfs are less impressive on corners; that's the price you pay for your comfortable drive.

As with most European vehicles, the indicator switch is on the left hand side of the steering wheel, not the right, so when you go to indicate and turn you instead operate the windscreen wipers. You'd get used to it if this was your only vehicle, but if you share two cars with the indicator on different sides of the steering column it will be an on-going pain in the backside.

We're tempted to go on about the good points of these cars, but that misses the point. However nice they may be when they're working, they may not be working long, and they're often unreasonably expensive to fix. If your heart is set on buying a VW Golf, then buy a new one, which will at least be under warranty for a while. If you can't afford to buy a new Golf, then – trust us – you certainly can't afford to buy an old one. You have been warned.

current models

If looks and a satisfying drive were all that was required to make a good car, this would be a winner. However, it was rushed onto the market using compromised technology and as a result ownership – even on new cars – has been something of a nightmare for some owners. Good knows how bad these vehicles are going to be when they're old.

Here's the direct experience of one Australian reader: "I bought a new VW Golf 1.9 TDI Comfortline a couple of weeks ago. The ABS control unit failed after 103 kilometres. This left the car with the ABS, traction control, power steering, engine management and brake system warning lights on and inoperative air conditioning, speedo, odometer & cruise control. The VW dealer, as usual, was very unhelpful. They initially said the parts would take up to a month to come from Germany. After threatening legal action and newspaper coverage the fault was fixed in 2 days..."

When the Golf is actually working it sets pretty high standards in functionality and it's hugely rewarding to drive. The Golf's multi-link suspension offers superb handling on most road surfaces and the Golf is still class-leading when it comes to driving pleasure. The six-speed DSG automatic gearbox is good and the later seven-speed gearbox is stunning, when working. The interior isn't much changed but it's slightly larger, making it one of the larger interiors in its class. And one of the most spartan: unlike the Eastern manufacturers, VW doesn't fill its cars with useful high tech at no extra charge; the basic Golf is pretty basic and you pay through the nose for your optional extras. However, the Golf comes with an impressive array of safety equipment and a five star rating from the European crash testers. For the first three years most of the Golf's problems should be covered under warranty. After that, my friend, you're on your own.

GOLF PLUS

The Golf PLUS is a slightly taller, 5-seater Golf version, designed to fill an imagined market niche between the standard Golf and the slightly-larger-still Touran. Basically it's a standard Golf with slightly more interior space.

GOLF GTI

The GTI has a long and distinguished history as VW's hot hatchback. The new version carries on the theme, with a dose of bling added for good measure. The outside carries lots of plastic chrome and the inside has pretend sporty seats (real sporty seats are available, for about the same cost as your summer holiday). Both the handling and performance of the GTI are excellent, let down sometimes by the DSG automatic gearbox, which fudges the changes from time to time. Most drivers simply choose manual changes via the flappy paddle gearshift behind the steering wheel. If you like European hot hatches, the GTI is a good choice, although you pay a lot for what you get.

• Golf R32. The name 'R32' is a carry-over from the previous version – a stylish performance-oriented car for the discerning hot hatchback owner. Aside from four-wheel drive and a slight increase in power, there's not much to distinguish the R32 from the GTI. Sure it's faster and has more bling, but what you pay for the extra seems scarcely worth it. Unlike the rest of the right-hand drive Golf range, the R32 isn't built in South Africa, so you're probably paying for the wages of those obsessive Germans.

CADDY / CADDY LIFE

The Caddy is a van version of the Golf. While it enjoys many of the creature comforts of the Golf, it lacks the Golf's sophisticated rear suspension. Instead it gets a fairly primitive leaf spring setup that is better for carrying loads but worse in terms of both handling and comfort. The Caddy's steering wheel adjusts for height but not reach, which may compromise the driving position for people who are large or small.

As a commercial vehicle the Caddy is compromised further by the fact that it's fairly light and small, and also the fact that there are plenty of Eastern light commercial models that leave it for dead in terms of both load-carrying

capacity and value for money. For example, the Hyundai iLoad offers a far roomier van for about the same money, and we have far greater faith in the reliability of the Hyundai than we have in the reliability of the Volkswagen.

At 4.4 metres long, the Caddy Life is far bigger than the Golf upon which it is based. The Caddy Life is a 'seven seater' version of the Caddy. However, 'seven seater' means different things to different people. The Caddy Life's commercial origins are soon apparent when you sit inside. The sliding side doors were designed for goods long before they were used to let people in and out. The sliding side windows won't win any art awards, either. Despite claims of high build quality, the ceiling trim looks like cheap cardboard to us and the interior looks like it was done on a fairly severe budget. There are plenty of storage nooks and crannies but no glovebox.

The seats are 'theatre style', which should really read: 'airline style', meaning they come in raised rows and they're never more than adequate with a full load of passengers. All seats are readily accessible, thanks to those sliding cargo doors, but the rear seats were designed for left-hand drive, so the seat folds in the wrong place for right hand drive passengers. Moreover, there's inadequate space for adults in the rear seats, despite any claims to the contrary. There's enough headspace, but there's simply too little space in front for adults to sit comfortably.

There's air conditioning for the folks at the front, and heat-reflective glass to help stop the interior turning into a sauna on hot days, but there's no air conditioning outlet for the rear passengers, which is a bit cheap.

If you have no need for the rear seat it can be removed entirely, but bear in mind that it weighs something like 50kg and it's not easy to lug around.

Also, folding the second and third rows of seats is far more difficult than it should be.

The Caddy's 1.6 petrol engine is best described as 'woefully inadequate'. It's simply working too hard all the time. The 1.9 diesel version is a far more practical proposition, although Volkswagen will sting you with a fairly hefty price increase for the diesel model. The diesel gives good fuel economy and plenty of power, but it's clattery as you drive along.

Standard Caddy versions come with a five-speed manual gearbox, with a six-speed semi-automatic as an expensive option.

On the road there's a lot of wind noise, road noise and a fair amount of vibration. The Caddy is easily buffeted by side winds.

The Caddy's primitive rear suspension is fine on smooth suburban roads, but soon shows its inadequacies on rougher surfaces. Bumps and potholes shake the van around and resonate throughout the vehicle.

All in all the Caddy feels like it's been done on the cheap, and although the Life is one of the cheapest seven-seaters available, we have too little faith in Volkswagen technology to recommend it.

TOURAN

The Touran is a stretched VW Golf, designed to carry goods and families. This vehicle seats seven, in theory, although not seven adults: it's a slightly enlarged VW Golf but doesn't handle nearly as well. The two rear seats are really only suitable for small children.

The Touran is full of neat cubbyholes and nifty seating arrangements, but nothing can disguise this vehicle's small internal dimensions. Many owners complain that it's hard to avoid water getting into the vehicle when you open the doors after rain. Tourans are also notorious for leaking like sieves.

Still, they're safe as houses and not all that unpleasant to drive in straight lines. Just don't get a flat tyre.

⚠ WARNING ⚠ Tourans have no spare tyre! Instead, you get a crappy can of spray foam and their best wishes that the tyre is intact enough to be pumped up. If not,

call a tow truck. See our article 'Tyresome Foolishness' in the links page after this review.

See also our comments on 'Diesels', 'European Cars', 'German Cars', 'Luxury Cars' & 'Turbochargers' in the links page after this review, and on Volkswagens at the front of this review

What goes wrong?

Engine problems

- The 1.6 & 2.0 FSI engines are extremely sensitive to petrol quality. Their fuel must have less than 10 parts per million of sulphur.

- The timing belt tensioners on the 1.4 & 1.6 engines are made of plastic and bite the dust at absurdly young ages. This usually doesn't cause major engine damage because the belt doesn't generally fly off, but this problem will strand you and may cause ongoing unreliability problems in the future.

- Timing belts on the 2.0 engines must be replaced on time or massive engine damage may occur.

- See our article 'A Question of Timing' in the links page after this review.

- Water pumps must be changed along with the timing belt or they are likely to fail without warning, causing the timing belt to come loose. This will cause massive engine damage.

- Turbochargers are common failure point on all these vehicles. They frequently fail just after the warranty has run out and are very expensive to fix.

- (Touran) The 1.9 PD 105 engine may develop internal leaks that cause the engine to start running on its own lubricating oil and be extremely difficult to make the engine stop running. The symptom of this problem is that the oil level may appear to rise by itself. This problem may also be related to the recall below:

🚗 RECALL 🇬🇧 Bora, Golf & Touran models with 3 and 4 cylinder pump injector diesel engine, built between 1 March & 31 August 2004 • The fuel pump cover bolts may break and allow fuel to leak.
VIN numbers: Not disclosed. [Google](#) 🇬🇧 AA
R/2004/211

Gearbox & drivetrain problems

- See our general automatic transmission warning at the end of this review.

🚗 RECALL 🇬🇧 Touran models built between December 2003 & May 2005 • The flywheel may fail and catch fire. VIN numbers:
WVG0001T04W04W044331 – WVG0001T04W177262
[Google](#) 🇬🇧 AA R/2005/091

- Clutch shudder and dual-mass flywheel failure is a known problem on these vehicles.

Steering & suspension problems

- Steering racks die young. These will be heinously expensive to fix once the vehicle leaves guarantee.

- (Touran) Tourans are notorious for having shuddery front wheels.

Brake & safety problems

- The ABS control units aren't very robust and tend to fail not long after the vehicle leaves warranty, at great expense.

- See our general airbag and ABS warning at the end of this review.

Body problems

- The safety reflectors on the doors drop off.

- Door seals commonly fail or fall off.

- Sunroofs leak.

- (Touran) Tourans are notorious for water leaks.

Interior problems

- Squeaks and rattles are a common problem

- The Golf has clever individual climate controls.

Unfortunately they are unreliable in operation and sometimes don't work at all.

- Electric windows and central locking are prone to erratic operation.

- Factory CD players aren't all that durable.

- (Touran) The air conditioning condenser is

extremely vulnerable to being damaged by stones, which will stop the system working and isn't covered by warranty.

Electrical problems

- Central locking develops Alzheimer's and forgets to work half the time

- Factory stereos give grief and may flatten the battery: if you don't have a CD in the player, the player may turn on the radio, which eventually flattens the battery.

- Alarms give grief

- The Golf has headlight light sensors and wiper rain sensors. Both of these are hopelessly over-sensitive and prone to erratic operation.

🚗 RECALL 🇬🇧 Jetta & Golf Estate diesel models built on 8 & 9 January 2007 • A faulty earth connector on the heater could start a fire.

VIN numbers @ [dogandlemon.com](#)

[Search theaa.com](#) 🇬🇧 R/2008/009



Safety Summary

★★★★★ out of five, EuroNCAP crashtests

In actual road smashes the driver of a smaller (lighter) car is far more likely to die than the driver of the larger (heavier) vehicle it collides with. (A Daewoo Matiz weighs about 725kg and a Range Rover weighs about 2500kg. This vehicle weighs about 1350kg, depending on the model). See also our general comments in the 'Safety' section (see the links page after this review).



Tech Specs

VIN PLATE LOCATION: Right of firewall

ENGINE TYPE & SIZE: (petrol)

- 1.4 BLG 1390cc DOHC MPI
- 1.6 BGU 1595cc DOHC MPI
- 2.0 BLX 1984cc DOHC MPI
- 2.0T AXX 1984cc DOHC MPI turbo
- 3.2 BUB 3189cc V6 DOHC MPI (diesel)

- 1.9 BKC 1896cc SOHC 8v DI
- 2.0T BKD 1968 DOHC MPI turbo

RECOMMENDED FUEL/S: (petrol) Premium

HOW MUCH FUEL? Realistic urban averages: (petrol)

- 1.4 9.6 litres/100km • 10.3 km/litre • 29 mpg
- 1.6 10.9 litres/100km • 9.2 km/litre • 26 mpg
- 2.0 11.2 litres/100km • 8.9 km/litre • 25 mpg
- 3.2 16.5 litres/100km • 6 km/litre • 17 mpg (diesel)

- 1.9 7.4 litres/100km • 13.5 km/litre • 38 mpg
- 2.0T 9 litres/100km • 11 km/litre • 31 mpg

HOW GREEN? (petrol)

- 1.4 😊/😊 • CO2 emissions (g/km) 165-174
- 1.6 😊/😊 • CO2 emissions (g/km) 165-182
- 2.0 😊 • CO2 emissions (g/km) 188-206
- 3.2 😊 • CO2 emissions (g/km) 231-255 (diesel)

- 1.9 😊 meets Euro standard IV

- 2.0 😊 meets Euro standard IV

Particulate emissions:

With Diesel Particulate Filter < 0.001

Without Diesel Particulate Filter = 0.019-0.022

Safety

PROPER SEATBELTS THROUGHOUT: Yes

PROPER SPARE TYRE: (Golf) No, spacesaver only. (Caddy)

Yes. (Touran) Tourans have no spare tyre! Instead, you get a crappy little can of spray foam and their best wishes that the tyre is intact enough to be pumped up. If not, call a tow truck. ANTI-SKID BRAKING (ABS): Yes

AIRBAGS: (Golf & Touran) Dual front, dual side and head-curtain, all models. (Caddy) Driver only all models. Passenger airbag and side airbags on more expensive models.

ELECTRONIC STABILITY CONTROL (ESC): Some

REVERSING CAMERA: No

SUITABLE FOR TOWING? Light trailers only, we think

(front-wheel drive vehicles aren't really suitable for heavy towing).

TOWING CAPACITY: (Golf and Caddy) unbraked 700-750kg, braked 1300-1500kg

- = 'new or like-new'
- = 'average'
- = 'rough or high mileage'
- = Japanese secondhand import
- = all countries



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Before you buy

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Choosing Your Car, The 5 Minute Check

British Cars

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Depreciation New Zealand

Depreciation Australia

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Japanese Imports

Vanity

European Cars

German Cars

Rich Men's Folly

Luxury Cars

Women

Cars & Other Dysfunctional Relationships

Women & Cars

Four-wheel drives

Driving Yourself Crazy

Yuppie Four Wheel Drives

Ownership issues

- Automatics & CVT Transmissions

CNG & LPG

Keeping it Cool

Know Your Battery

A Question of Timing

Tyresome Foolishness

Turbochargers & Superchargers

Environment

The Age of Uncertainty

Cars & the Environment

Hybrids

Reality Killed the Electric Car

Cars & the world we live in

- A Long Way from Paradise

- The Dream Merchants

Cars & Nazis

The Chinese Bubble

Safety

- Playing it Safe

- The Seven Deadly Sins

- Electronic Stability Control

Calming the Madness

Cars 1970 - 1988

Classic Cars & Safety

A Comedy of Errors

A Fine Mess

Four-Wheel Drives & Safety

That Sleep of Death

A Tragic Lack of Restraint

Vans & Safety

Victims of Circumstance

When a Phone Box Pulls Out in Front of You

The meaning of life

Dictionary

Blown head gasket warning

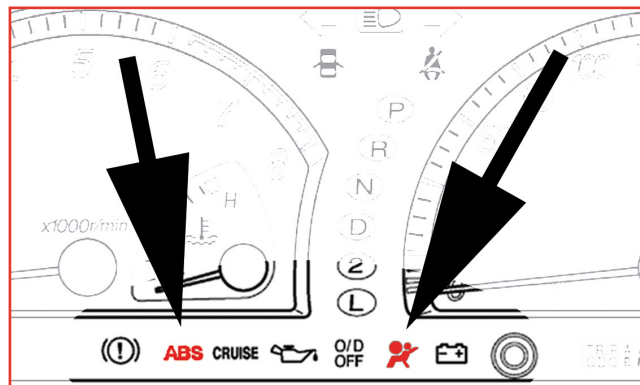
Modern engines work hard. Because of this, they tend to get hot and frequently 'blow their top', especially if the engine has been overheated or run without fresh antifreeze. Head gaskets may be very expensive to fix and if left unfixed you'll probably end up broken down at the side of the road. Worse, blown head gaskets sometimes lead to total engine failure.

The symptoms of a blown head gasket are mysterious coolant loss, sometimes accompanied by rough running and overheating, clouds of white steam coming from the exhaust, oil in the water, water in the oil, and/or white goo under the oil filler cap (see picture opposite). You should also lift out the oil dipstick. If the oil is the colour of the white goo in the middle of the oil filler cap in the picture, you have a cracked cylinder head and/or blown head gasket.



ABS & airbag warning

- Both the ABS (anti-skid braking) and airbag warning lights should go on and then off when you first start the vehicle. If this does not happen, the vehicle may require a major, extremely expensive repair **immediately** (if either the ABS or airbag warning lights do not go on at all, someone's probably disconnected them to hide the fact that the ABS or airbag system is faulty). If either warning light comes on while you are driving, this may mean a serious malfunction in the vehicle's safety systems, and the vehicle should not be driven, let alone purchased.



Automatic transmission warning

- Automatic transmissions that do not shift smoothly during a test drive are probably not long of this earth. Also, WITH THE VEHICLE AT NORMAL OPERATING TEMPERATURE (so that the engine is not idling too fast) put the handbrake on and try switching the gear selector between forward and reverse – this should happen quickly and smoothly without any clunk – if not, suspect big repair bills in the near future.

Note: the advice below may not apply on some modern cars, because there may be no dipstick to check. See our articles on automatic transmissions and CVT transmissions on our website for further information (click the article • **Automatics & CVT Transmissions** link on the 'online links' page).

With the transmission in neutral and the engine running at normal operating temperature, lift out the transmission dipstick, wipe it clean, put it back in and then remove it again. The automatic transmission fluid should be a happy cherry red colour & should be within the marked area on the transmission dipstick – if it's not, abuse and/or neglect is pretty likely and the vehicle should be avoided!

