

SEAT EXEO ST



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If you are a fan of the renowned Audi A4 Avant then you'll love SEAT's Exeo Sport Tourer.

Why? Because it's the same car - kind of. It's based on the 2001 launched Audi and makes a good-value alternative to cars like the Toyota Avensis, Vauxhall Insignia and Ford Mondeo.

I'm not sure why, but the Spanish car doesn't look quite as dashing as its German counterpart. It's close though. Apart from the modern bi-xenon headlamps and LED tail lamps – and the obvious lack of four rings, it's pretty much the same as the old Audi.

The interior looks very familiar too. The Exeo has benefitted from the safety kit that has found its way into newer Audis, and is absolutely up to date in this regard. Other recognisable parts include a dash taken from more youthful A4s. These are all good things and the SEAT Exeo ST feels solid, well screwed together and classy – just like an Audi A4 in fact. And, guess what? It drives almost as well. Honestly.

I test drove the SE Tech 2.0 TDI 143 PS version of the Exeo. It has bags of pulling power, and it's comfortable. At slower speeds the steering feels heavy, but the model's six-speed manual gearbox is slick and, while fine for pottering around town, the car is at its best cruising at motorway speeds.

Lift the tailgate and the cargo area of the SEAT Exeo ST is square and low, which makes for easy loading. It's not the largest estate out there, but it's big enough to stuff in your camping gear or a couple of your kids' buggies and the family's weekly shop. There's also a very useful, retractable load cover to hide everything from prying eyes.

So, what else should you know about this executive class SEAT? Well, fresh styling enhancements, including

chic new alloy wheel designs, have further highlighted the Exeo's appearance, while improvements to interior materials, such as finer leather on the steering wheel and revised upholstery have created a plush feel.

Meanwhile, developments to the SEAT estate's 2.0 TDI common rail engine now sees emissions cut. Economy is improved, too. Indeed, 2012 sees further upgrades to the Exeo family, with the addition of SEAT's Start/Stop technology, which helps deliver even more fuel efficiency.

The Exeo's design adjustments linked to SEAT's ongoing pledge to improve quality, while at the same time cutting its cars' emissions and improving fuel consumption, are sure to spark further awareness of the model, which is now the Spanish marque's third best-seller in the UK behind the Ibiza and Leon.

In the balancing act of work and family life, the Exeo ST finds the perfect equilibrium. Whatever you do, wherever you go, the car will get you there in comfort and in style – just like the last-generation Audi A4 did before it.

PROS 'N' CONS

- Refined ✓
- Comfortable ✓
- Good load area ✓
- Fuel efficient ✓
- Heavy steering X

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 130 mph
- 0-62 mph: 9.6 secs
- Combined mpg: 56.6
- Engine: 1968 cc 16v turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 141 at 4200 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 236 at 1750-2500 rpm
- CO₂: 132 g/km
- Price: £23,225 on the road

Editor's note: apologies for the mistake in last month's pros 'n' cons and fast facts, which was due to an editing error.