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Wheels: Tiguan Offers R-E-S-P-E-C-T on Moscow Roads

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With cushy seats, easy handling and a roomy interior, the Kaluga-assembled Volkswagen Tiguan is a sweet ride.

Editor's note: Wheels is a section featuring car reviews.

Who would have thought that a cross between a tiger and an iguana could command respect on a Moscow road? But that's exactly what I found with the Volkswagen Tiguan.

Something odd seemed afoot shortly after I slid behind the steering wheel of the Tiguan Sport & Style 2.0 TSI, a compact crossover vehicle whose name is a combination of the German words for tiger ("Tiger") and iguana ("Leguan"). For the first time in memory, I didn't have to fight with other drivers to change lanes.

Facts at a Glance

Tiguan Sport & Style 2.0 TSI

Starting price:
899,000 rubles
($26,930)
The model that I drove cost
1,519,480 rubles
($45,500)
Technical Specifications:
0-100 kph: 9.9 seconds
Top speed: 197 kph
Economy: 9.9 kpl

Source: Volkswagen

Let me explain.

Switching lanes can be a major problem in Moscow. When I drive my own Renault Logan economy car, I can usually expect to wait for three or more cars to speed past my blinking turn signal before an opening will appear or a driver will give way. The risky alternative is to follow the lead of some drivers and jerk the nose of the car into the next lane, forcing the other drivers to yield.

But when I took the cherry-red Tiguan for a spin on the Third Ring Road on a recent afternoon, I found that I no longer had to wait. After switching on the right-turn signal, I glanced into the side mirror, and I saw with surprise that the Ford SUV in the next lane was actually waiting for me to pull over. A short time later, a Volkswagen Polo gave me the right of way as I prepared to change lanes again.

The scenario repeated itself again and again during the 10 days of the test drive: Zhigulis, Chevrolets, Audis and KIAs allowed me to move over.

Pretty soon I began to feel like I owned the road. I began to hum R&B singer Aretha Franklin's 1967 hit "Respect": "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me. Sock it to me, sock it to me ..."

Indeed, only one car put up a fight: a rusty Volga sedan with peeling white paint. Its driver noticeably sped up upon seeing my turn signal.

What's Hot

With cushy seats, easy handling and a roomy interior, the Volkswagen Tiguan is one sweet ride. But some bells and whistles are especially worth noting.

In addition to a DVD player and music center, the video display in the dashboard contains a navigation system that shows the fastest route (with options for 2D, 3D or satellite view) and the speed limit. I was surprised to learn after driving my Logan for months on Prospekt

Mira that one stretch has a speed limit of 80 kilometers per hour while another part is restricted to 60 kph. Interestingly, I made this discovery while whizzing along at 120 kph in the 60 kph zone as I attempted to keep up with the surging traffic, including a white-and-blue traffic police car whose occupants paid no attention to the fact that they and the cars around them were traveling at double the speed limit.

In the test vehicle that I drove, the navigation system's text and the spoken voice settings could be switched between Russian, English, German and Spanish. Unlike the popular Yandex Navigator app on cell phones, the Volkswagen system didn't lose contact with the satellite when passing through tunnels.

Among the other perks are a rearview camera with distance sensors that appear on the video display when you back up, and a second display behind the steering wheel that identifies which street you are traveling on and how many kilometers before the next turn. The display also includes basics like the outside air temperature and how many kilometers you can drive before needing to refill the gas tank.

The car also offers a Bluetooth device for cell phones and an anti-lock braking system with a feature that prevents sliding on Moscow ice.

What's Not

Despite its usefulness, the navigation system also proved to be something of a headache. The map didn't include newer streets that have opened over the past year or so, so it showed me driving through a field instead of Proyektiruyemy Prospekt, which runs parallel to the traffic-clogged Dmitryovskoye Shosse just north of the MKAD.

It also took me some time to figure out how to enter the addresses of desired destinations, and the navigation system only shows the most direct route, without taking into account Moscow's never-ending traffic jams. I ended up using both the car navigator and Yandex Navigator on my cell phone to avoid getting caught in traffic.

Speaking of cell phones, a USB connector inside the driver's side armrest at first rejected my iPhone 5, saying it was incompatible. But the connector recharged the phone successfully when I made a subsequent attempt to connect it.

A Volkswagen representative assured me that the issues with the missing Moscow streets and the iPhone were limited to the test-drive vehicle. She said the latest Tiguans, which are assembled at Volkswagen's plant in the Kaluga region, were compatible with the iPhone 5 and navigation systems updated with latest information.

Bottom Line

When it comes to comfort, you can't go wrong with a car that offers heated leather seats and individualized climate control. But I found that the Tiguan Sport & Style 2.0 TSI with 200 horsepower and automatic transmission offered something much more: respect. Sock it to me!

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