The 2012 Volkswagen Tiguan is a five-passenger compact SUV that provides both utility and a dash of performance thanks to the same 2.0-litre TSI engine that powers the GTI hot hatch.

Tiguan performs for a compact SUV

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As a whole, the compact SUV segment has a lot of really good vehicles, but many of them are not what you would call exciting to drive.

An exception would be the 2012 Volkwagen Tiguan, a premium crossover SUV that offers a dash of performance along with the utility one enjoys in these smaller SUVs.

For 2012 Volkswagen has given the Tiguan a mid-cycle refresh, including a front-end facelift that includes a new-look grille, headlights and LED daytime running lights.

Performance is supplied by Volkswagen's familiar 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine, producing 200 hp and 207 lb/ft of torque.

The engine is mated with either a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic with Tiptronic and the Tiguan is offered in front- or all-wheel drive.

One major improvement for 2012 is in fuel economy, which VW says is improved by 16 per cent over previous models in highway driving.

Three trim levels for the Tiguan are again offered in Canada— Trendline, Comfortline and Highline.

My tester was a top-shelf Highline model, starting at $38,875. With the optional Technology Package ($2,300) and Sport Package ($1,900), the price as tested climbed to $43,075 plus freight and PDI of $1,580.

The Highline is available only with the six-speed automatic with Tiptronic and features VW's famous 4MOTION all-wheel drive.

Prices for the base Trendline model start at $27,875 and the Comfortline at $31,375, setting the Tiguan at the premium end of the compact SUV price scale.

Both the Trendline and Comfortline offer the full-range of transmission choices, plus the aforementioned 4MOTION all-wheel drive in addition to the standard front-wheel drive.

Moving up the model range, the Tiguan sits on 16-18 inch alloy wheels with 19-inchers available on the Highline as part of the Sport Package, which also includes sport suspension and bi-xenon headlights with LED technology.

The Technology Package, available on Comfortline and Highline trims includes a touch-screen navigation system with 30 GB hard drive, 300-watt Dynaudio digital sound package, rear park distance control and SIRIUS satellite radio.

The interior gets a makeover as well for 2012 with a higher quality of cloth upholstery. The Comfortline has leatherette on the seating surfaces with real leather on the Highline model. The seats are comfy, even for lengthy jaunts, with good lateral support.

All in all, interior fit and finish is good on the German-built Tiguan, as one would expect on a premium model. Soft-touch materials add to the upscale look.

The rear seats have fore and aft movement and are slightly elevated theatre style.

But on the road is where the Tiguan really shines, thanks to the same gutsy power plant found in the Golf GTI performance hatchback. Premium unleaded fuel is suggested because of the turbocharger, but the 200 hp and 207 lb/ft of torque provides performance that other compact SUVs only dream about.

Around town, it's quiet, smooth and comfortable but punch the throttle on the open road and the Tiguan is ready to pounce. Fuel economy is rated at 9.7L/100 km city and 7.6L/100 km highway.

So while you pay a premium price for the Volkswagen Tiguan, you're getting a premium product that gives a touch of performance with the utility of an SUV.

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