## New Beetle combines retro chic with practicality

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And there's significantly more cargo room with 436 litres behind the 50/50 split folding rear seats and 850 litres with them folded. The ëold' New Beetle provided 300 and 770. This makes the 2012 model nearly as practical as any four-passenger coupe.

I say 'nearly,' because it's a bit of a scramble getting in the back seats. It was no problem for my kids, but for my elderly parents... well, I didn't even try.

According to officials at VW Canada, the entire platform is all-new, as is every body panel.

Mechanicals are based upon the new Jetta, and this includes both engines. The base powerplant, which is also a carryover from the last generation Beetle, has been tuned for better fuel economy and performance.

"The design team was tasked with the goal of a significant improvement in driving character," adds Thomas Tetzlaff, VW's manager of public relations.

In the 2010 New Beetle, its 2.5-litre inline five cylinder made 150 hp and 170 lb/ft of torque. Starting with the Golf and Jetta, and now in the 2012 Beetle, that increases to 170 hp and 177 lb/ft.

This engine powers all Comfortline (\$21,975) and Highline (\$24,225) Beetles, and is mated either to a five-speed manual or optional six-speed automatic with Tiptronic that adds \$1,400 to the base price.

It also drives the Premiere (\$24,475) and Premiere+ (\$26,575) models, which are a limited-production run of 600 units, intended to prime the sales pump in Canada.

They come only with the six-speed auto, and when they're gone, they're gone.

My tester for the week was a Premium+, which provides numerous Comfortline features, some Highline, and even a Sportline item (the 18-inch alloys) along with a panoramic sunroof for an extra \$1,400.

Its equipment list is long, but includes keyless entry with pushbutton start, heated front seats (upholstered in leatherette), flat-bottomed leather-wrapped steering wheel with cruise and audio controls, Bluetooth hands-free phone, power heated exterior mirrors, eight-speaker, 400-watt Fender premium audio system and five-inch color touchscreen navigation system with media interface with SD card and iPod inputs.

The interior is thoroughly modern, with the high level of fit and finish you'd expect from Volkswagen.

The chrome rings around the knobs and vents are a nice touch, as are the metallic accents and abundance of soft-touch materials.

There is one retro feature that really stands out, and it's the body-colour faceplates on the dash. This applies to all trim levels but the Sportline, which gets carbon fibre.

Seats up front are eight-way manually adjustable and heated, providing firm support. There's no middle position in back, and seating here is also on the firm side.

The suspension, however, is forgiving, not mushy. The Premiere gets independent front McPherson struts with stabilizer bar and transverse link rear axle with integrated stabilizer bar.

It felt a bit soft in rear, as the Beetle really sits back when you plant the pedal. Still, there was minimal lean in the corners, and with its brisk takeoff and decent steering feedback, was a pleasure to drive that the original never was.

Sport mode dials this up a notch, providing later shifts for even better acceleration.

The Sportline model gets a 2.0-litre turbo four (200 hp and 207 lb/ft of torque), mated to a six-speed manual or six-speed DSG with Tiptronic.

I haven't yet had the opportunity to drive this

Beetle, but was impressed by the same engine in the heavier Jetta GLI.

The turbo-powered Beetles will be trickling into dealer showrooms over the next month or so, with more availability in February. I hope to give this model a good run in the spring, when the weather improves.

Still, turbo or not, the 2012 Beetle is a fun ride that combines retro chic with some level of practicality.



The interior of the 2012 Beetle is thoroughly modern.



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