



ABOVE: The third row seat folds below the cargo floor for unrestricted loading. The second row seats also fold or can be fully removed as shown.

Room for all in the Routan

• from VOLKSWAGON on page B13

Elizabeth Way to come home amid double pup tankers and 53-footers all hurtling along at 130 km/h, I was thankful for the power of the engine to join in the fray.

Canada will get four trim levels: the base Trendline starting at \$27,975; the Comfortline starting at \$33,975; the Highline starting at \$39,975 and the Execline (as tested here) starting at \$49,975. Each model has a large number of standard and optional features that cover two printed pages on the handout I got. Probably the best way to get a deeper look is to go to www.vw.ca and build one for yourself.

While this is classified as a "small" minivan, it is anything but and will fill any standard-size garage. But when it comes to picking a seat, there won't be any quibbling because there is room for all in the Routan.

With all three rows of seats up, there is 930 litres of cargo space behind the third row. Fold the third row seat beneath the cargo floor and there is 2,400 litres. The third row, by the way, has three positions including tipping it over backwards to have a tailgate party seating. The second row seats either fold or can be taken out completely for even more cargo space. There is currently no Stow-n-Go feature like the Chrysler, but never say never.

Standard features in the all-new 2009 Routan include three-zone climate control, CD player with six speakers, dual sliding side doors, front and side curtain airbags, Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), and Electronic Stabilization Program (ESP).

Safety remains a priority for Routan passengers, with the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) awarding the 2009 Volkswagen Routan with a best-in-class safety rating, with maximum five-star ratings for frontal collisions and for front and rear passengers in side impacts. Its unibody construction and low centre of gravity allowed the 2009 Routan to earn a best-in-class four-star rating for resistance to rollover as well.

Part of the ride-and-drive event involved touring through Niagara wine country on a day with autumn sunshine that had a sublimely rich golden tone. My driving partner and I found the day so pleasant and the Niagara Parkway meandering from Fort Eire up the The Falls was more like having your own driveway. Had we hammocks and good books, we agreed we would have stopped, phoned in that we'd be late, and lazed through the afternoon.

It gave pause for both of us to marvel at how stunningly beautiful this part of the world can be. If you get the chance, grab a Routan or anything you have, and take the drive down for the fruits, the wines and the relaxation. It is good for the soul.

And I got thinking about my gang at home and how VW's John White was right when he said there would always be a need for a seven-seat vehicle.

So when I asked at the top, what must Volkswagen have been thinking with the Routan; it looks to me like they were thinking ahead.



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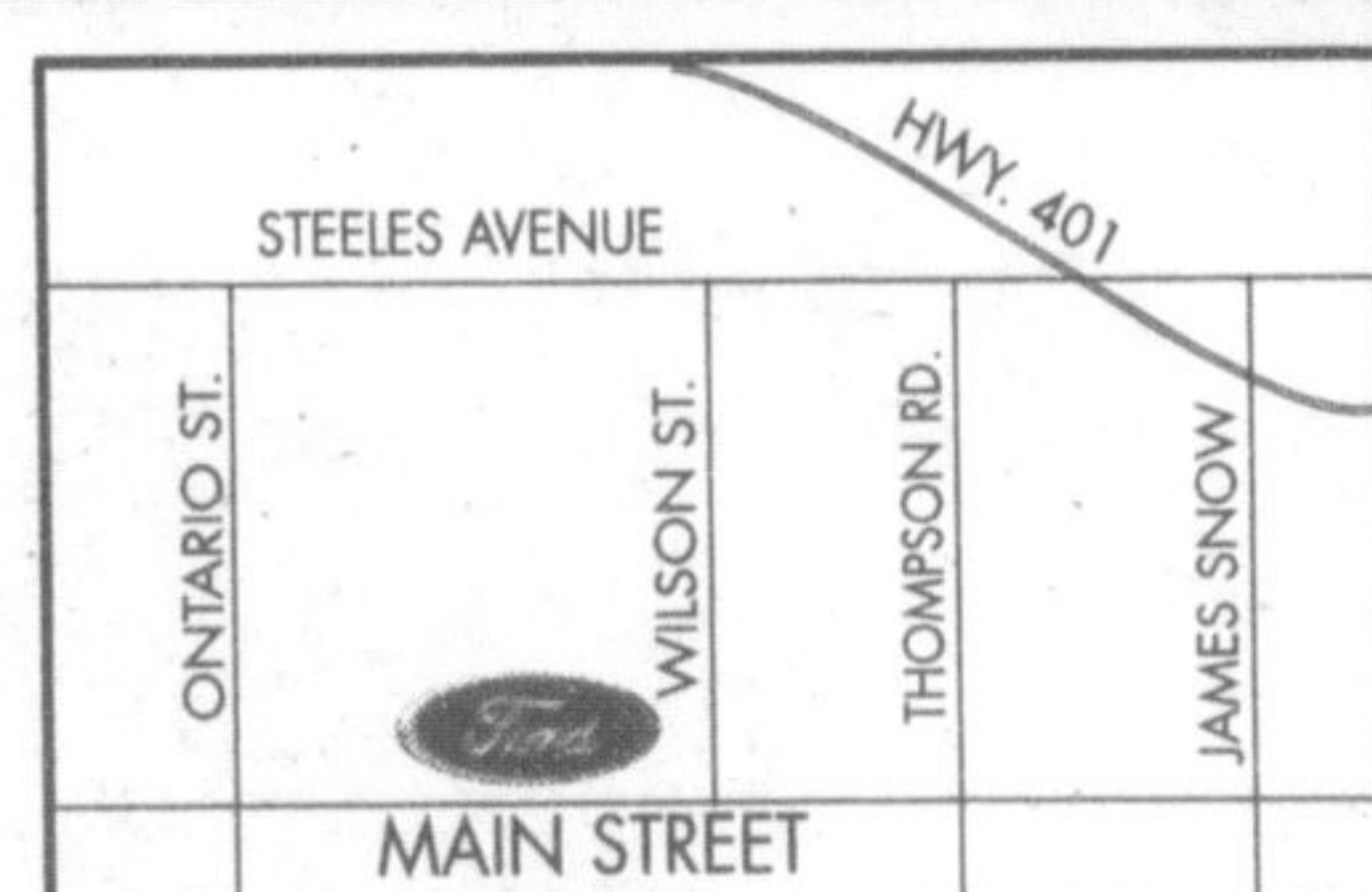
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