

The cabin was beautifully finished in dark leather, highlighted by chrome on the shifter, shifter plate, hand-brake, door releases and steering wheel VW badge.

Passat responds and handles like a sports car

From front page

laid out in a unique "double V" or "W" configuration, unlike any other 8-cylinder engine ever built. Think of it as two V-4s bolted together in a compact architecture that fits in the space of a V6.

This high-tech W8 engine makes an impressive 270 hp @ 6000 rpm and 273 lb-ft of torque at 2750 rpm.

Punch the pedal and the motor responds with an almost muscle car moan, pushing you into the seat and clocking 0-100 kilometers in just over 6 seconds.

Volkswagen engineers utilized four adjustable camshafts and added two balancing shafts to the engine. The shafts move in opposite rotation of each other at twice the crankshaft speed. Vibrations caused by the ignition sequence and shapes of the crankshafts have been eliminated.

High-power performance

Driver benefits from all this technology are smooth, high-power performance, reduced fuel consumption and minimal emissions.

In fact, the W8 engine meets Europe's strict EU4 emission standards well ahead of the 2005 deadline. Fuel economy is rated at 13.8/19.2/1/100 km (city/hwy) or about 18/25 mpg (city/hwy). I averaged around 12.5 litres per 100 km during my travels.

The Passat W8 mates the engine with a 5-speed Tiptronic driver-selectable automatic transmission and standard 4MOTION all-wheel drive. This traction-enhancing drive system distributes torque to all four wheels at all speeds. In normal driving conditions, the drive ratio is split 50/50 to front and rear. On slippery surfaces, the wheels with the most traction get the most power - up to a front/rear ratio of 67 percent to 33 percent or vice versa.

The all-wheel drive traction combined with the 8-cylinder power and a class-leading body and chassis stiffness gives the W8 what Volkswagen refers to as "sports car-like responsiveness and handling."

And they have a point. The Passat W8 swoops with knife-edged confidence along country road curves, corners nimbly in the city and powers easily past slower traffic. It forces you to check the rear view mirror to remind yourself that, yes, you are indeed inside a station wagon.

The cargo area is a substantial one-size-up from the Jetta wagon, offering 1 cubic metre (36 cu.ft.) of cargo space, expanding to 1.55 cubic metres (54.6 cu.ft.) with the rear seat folded down. The fully carpeted cargo area also comes with corner tie-down hooks, stainless steel leading edge protection and a sliding cargo cover.

Long list of safety features

All Passats offer a long list of standard safety features, including driver and front passenger airbags, side-impact airbags, front and rear outboard three-point safety belts with pretensioners and shoulder height adjustment, and the LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) system in the rear outboard seating positions. Volkswagen's Side Curtain Protection protects the heads of front and rear passengers in a severe side collision.

Even small interior details help provide occupant protection - the absence of sharp interior edges, recessed handles and control switches, crushable sun visors, a collapsible steering column and a foldable rearview mirror. The Passat also provides three height-adjustable head restraints for the rear seat, a feature found on few other cars in its segment.

This extensive automotive package is wrapped up in the classic Passat exterior design and clear-glass lighting that has been benchmarked and copied by many recent rivals.

The W8 package adds to this exterior styling with high-intensity discharge headlamps with power washers, unique 16-inch alloy wheels, chrome dual exhaust tips, and two exclusive colours - Blue Spirit and Pacific Blue. Driving enthusiasts can push the already impressive performance envelope even further with an optional 6-speed manual transmission and a Sport Package with 17-inch alloy wheels and a specialized sport suspension.

With all that performance and all those goodies listed just make it harder to get out of the Passat W8. Heck, you don't even have to lock me in.

There are other station wagons that you can buy. But I doubt that you could buy a better one.

Freelander improved for 2004



The Range Rover Freelander is being freshened for 2004 with a number of improvements.

Land Rover's award-winning Freelander has been comprehensively improved and upgraded for 2004.

The changes include a new interior and major external revisions, including new face and tail. There is also an additional derivative, for European markets, the Freelander Sport, the sharpest handling and sportiest Land Rover production model ever.

The most obvious enhancements are to the styling. The front bumper, headlamps and front grille are brand new, and adopt the distinctive family face pioneered by the new Range Rover. The new, twin-pocket clear lens headlamps are similar to those of the Freelander's big brother, the Range Rover, and provide a higher light intensity - improved by

70 per cent. The front bumpers are restyled and are now body coloured.

The rear bumper is also now body coloured, and the tail lamps have been repositioned higher on the bumper, improving their visibility and reducing the likelihood of them being obscured by road grime or off-roading dust.

The cabin of the 2004 Freelander has been comprehensively restyled, to improve comfort and the feeling of luxury. There is a new fascia, new instruments, new switchgear, new door trims and new seats on most models, that offer better body and under-thigh comfort, plus new upholstery fabrics. The cabin doesn't just look better. The feel of the materials has also been greatly improved.

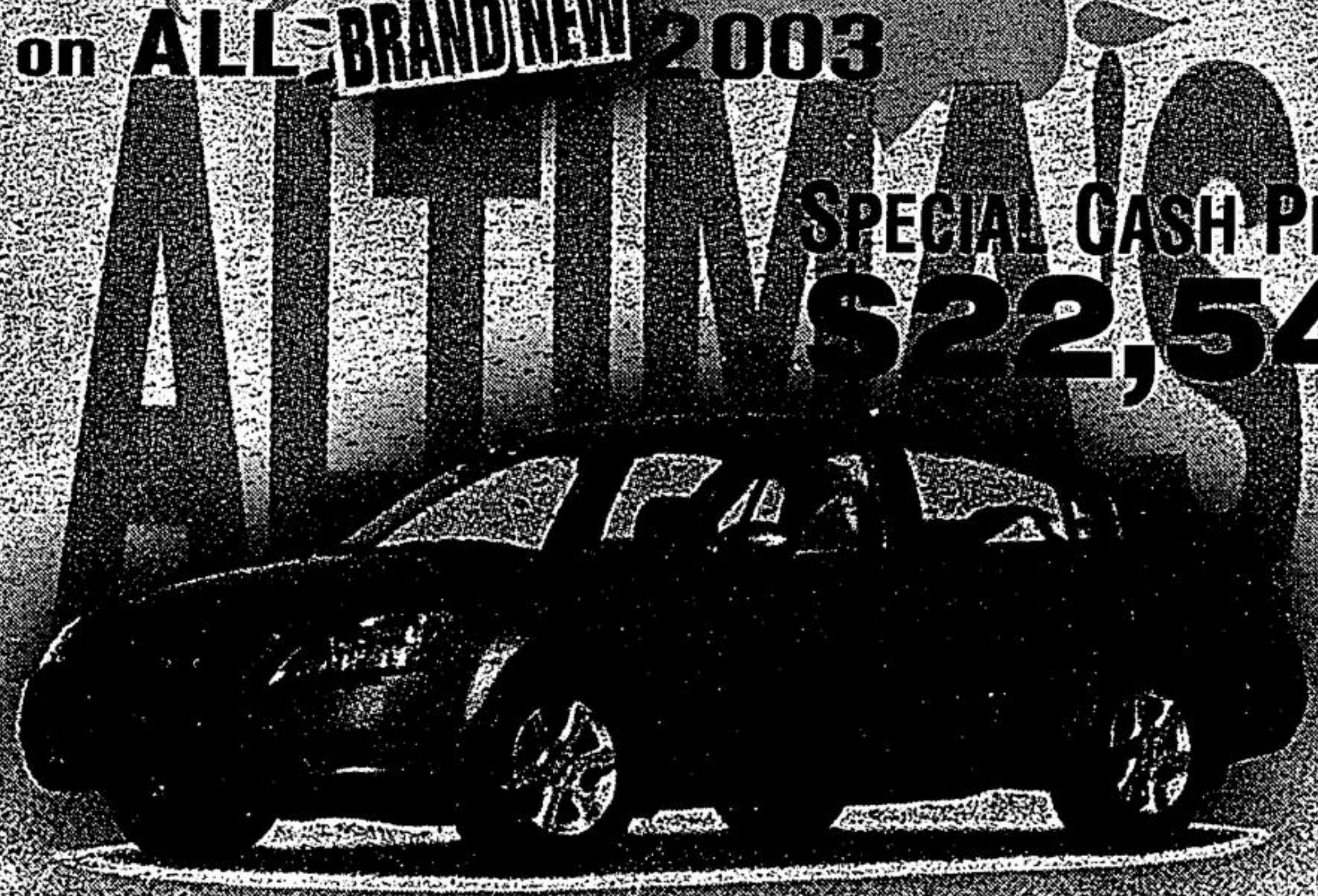
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