

CanadianDriver

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First Drive: 2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI
Review and photos by Jil McIntosh

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[2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI](#)

Muskoka, Ontario – It's very quiet in Ontario's "cottage country," an area of many lakes, much forest, and relatively few people. And it's also very quiet inside a Volkswagen Touareg TDI, despite the long-held opinion many people hold, that of diesels being noisy, smelly and considerably associated with sooty exhaust.

The TDI now joins the gasoline-only, 3.6-litre V6 Touareg – Volkswagen says it has dropped the "Touareg 2" name it previously used – as a 2009 model. A 4.2-litre V8 used in 2008 has been discontinued; it has also carried a diesel before, a mighty V10 version last seen for 2005.

But this one is not just any diesel; it's Volkswagen's Clean Diesel, a new system that meets strict North American emissions standards, including fifty-state compliance in the U.S. It joins the Jetta TDI and the upcoming Golf VI TDI. It's part of Volkswagen's blanket BlueMotion Technologies initiative, which will eventually also expand to include hybrids and other fuel- and emission-efficient technologies. Already in place in Europe, the BlueMotion initiative was introduced at the Vancouver Auto Show earlier this year, part of Volkswagen's strategy to have Canada at the forefront in North America.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. Click image to enlarge



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. Click image to enlarge

Manufacturer's web site

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It's smart thinking, given that Canadians have traditionally been more open to diesels than most American buyers. In Canada, diesel engines account for 62 per cent of all Jetta sales, 77 per cent of Jetta Wagon sales, and 23 per cent of all Volkswagen sales combined. While the Touareg isn't traditionally a huge seller in Canada, the company is hoping to change that with this new model, which offers improved fuel economy and longer range to a tank of fuel. It will launch on June 1, 2009, with 200 units available at initial sale.

Other than the engine, the gasoline and diesel

versions are equipped similarly, in three trim lines: Comfortline, Highline, and Execline, a top-drawer model that will only be available in limited quantities. The diesel engine adds \$4,000 to the price of the gasoline models, with the TDI Comfortline starting at \$48,975, the TDI Highline at \$57,975, and the TDI Execline at \$62,675. All of them come with 4XMotion, the company's name for its permanent all-wheel drive system, which can be manually locked into High or Low using a clever console-mounted switch that folds down flush when it's not needed.

I started off in the Comfortline, and prepared for a day of driving on a variety of road surfaces, including some very light off-road duty that consisted mostly of dirt roads made a bit muddy by some rain the day before. Features on this base model include dual-zone automatic climate control, heated "leatherette" seats, multifunction steering wheel, sunroof, folding rear seats, and cruise control. I was surprised, though, that for almost \$50,000, I had to adjust the seat manually; you need to move up to the Highline to get a power seat. My tester was further enhanced with a Technology Package, which adds navigation, rearview camera, media device interface, Dynaudio premium stereo and multifunction display; it's a \$3,450 option on all trim lines.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. [Click image to enlarge](#)

It also had the optional \$2,400 Sport Package of 19-inch alloy wheels, silver roof rails and sport suspension that can be added to everything, as can be a \$700 trailer hitch. The Highline and Execline (but not the Comfortline) can also have Bluetooth connectivity installed, for \$375 – again, a curious omission on such an expensive vehicle, given that it was standard on the \$21,000 Kia I'd driven the week before.

The diesel gives the expected low-end power: it makes 225 horsepower at 3,750 rpm, compared with the gasoline engine's 280 horses at 6,200 rpm. And while the gas version makes 265 lb-ft of torque at 2,500 rpm, the diesel pumps out 406 lb-ft, starting at 1,750 rpm and sticking around until 2,250 rpm. The diesel doesn't feel quick, but it certainly feels powerful, with good, solid, steady strength available at just about any notch on the throttle. Whether you need to get up to speed on a ramp, get around a transport convoy on the highway, climb a steep hill or just get away from a light, the Touareg handles them all with nary a drop of sweat. In fact, the toughest thing for me was keeping the speed down; it was very easy to cruise at 60 km/h and then be up around 80 or 90 without even realizing it, because it all happens so smoothly.

I've driven Touareg models before, with some of the various engines previously available, and never cared for the way the transmission shifted. This time around, the six-speed is perfectly mated to the engine, and it's buttery-smooth as it moves from cog to cog; the whole driveline is extremely impressive.

The engine is naturally noisier than the gasoline version when you're standing outside the vehicle, although of course there's none of the clatter that was inherent to many older oil-burners. Inside the cabin, I doubt any passenger who didn't know what was under the hood would be able to identify it as anything other than gasoline. In fact, very little of the outside world makes its way into the Touareg: it's an extremely well-insulated and quiet vehicle.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. Click image to enlarge

The difference between a regular diesel and Volkswagen's Clean Diesel isn't so much in the engine as in the exhaust stream, which uses a number of technologies to reduce the particulate matter and nitrogen oxide (NOx) that make untreated diesel emissions objectionable. These include a diesel oxidation catalytic converter stuffed with three temperature sensors to monitor the stream, a filter that traps and incinerates particulates, and a "DeNOx converter," which further reduces emissions via an additive called AdBlue.

AdBlue – which is clear, not blue, despite the name – is the key ingredient in the Selective Catalyst Reduction (SCR) system used, necessary to reduce NOx levels in a vehicle of this size (Volkswagen's diesel-powered Jetta and upcoming Golf don't need it because they don't weigh as much as the Touareg). This urea solution is injected and swirled into the exhaust stream, where the heat converts it into ammonia, which greatly increases the effectiveness of the DeNOx converter.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. Click image to enlarge

The fluid is stored in a tank that sits under the spare tire in the back of the vehicle, its depletion rate timed in line with the regularly scheduled maintenance so that the dealer will fill the tank while the oil's being changed. There's also a system that starts flashing warnings in the instrument cluster's message centre, with the first notice coming at about 2,500 km before expected depletion. It'll keep warning you at regular intervals. If you ignore it and let the tank run dry, the Touareg will continue to run for that cycle, but once you turn off the key, it won't start again until the AdBlue tank is refilled. Even so, it's relatively idiot-proof: each new vehicle comes with two bottles,

about two litres each – another 2,000 to 4,000 km worth of driving – and they can be refilled at a dealer. The bottles screw into the tank's filler hole and must then be pushed in to start the AdBlue flowing, so spillage isn't a problem. In short, while there will always be the odd motorist out there who will manage to do it, you've got to work very hard to find yourself completely stranded.

The primary reason for diesels outside of stump-pulling work trucks is their fuel economy, and the Touareg doesn't disappoint. While the gasoline V6 is rated at 14.8 L/100 km in the city and 10.3 on the highway (19 and 27 mpg, respectively), the TDI checks in at 11.9 L/100 km for city, and 8.0 on the highway (24 and 35 mpg), giving it a range of more than 1,200 km per tank of fuel.

And while diesel has been considerably more expensive in the last little while, which has turned many people away from such models, pricing is now more in line, with diesel again selling for less than gasoline in many areas of the country. If you can find a station selling it, the Touareg is certified for B5 biodiesel, as are all of Volkswagen's new Clean Diesel engines.

It's always surprising to get out of the Touareg and stand beside it, because only then do you realize how big it is; although it's very roomy inside, it drives like a much smaller vehicle, and visibility is very good all around. It's got a good, solid stance on the highway, and there's no suspension noise over bumps. I don't like the steering feel, though; it's far too light, and I complained to my co-driver that I definitely wasn't talking to the front wheels. On an unmaintained dirt road, the wheel jerked back and forth far more than expected as the tires dipped into the ruts. There needs to be more weight to the steering to give it a more confident feel.

And while it was more of a quibble than a complaint, the Canadian version has retained a safety system developed for the stick-shift-heavy European market: you must depress the brake pedal before the engine will start. I can understand a shift interlock, which prevents putting the vehicle into Drive from Park without the brake, and owners will no doubt quickly become accustomed to the system, but it got very tiresome turning the key without result, and then remembering that I needed my foot involved, as well.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. [Click image to enlarge](#)



I do like that it starts with a key – a pushbutton ignition is found only on the Execline – as I’ve never felt it much of a hardship to twist the ignition, especially versus wondering if you really have the key in your pocket as you drive away, or if you left it in the house when you ran back inside for that last item. I also like several other things about the Touareg’s interior: big, chunky dials for the climate control temperature, at just the right spot so you don’t have to take your eyes off the road to grab them; exceptional fit-and-finish; the gorgeous two-tone black and saddle brown of the Highline I drove in the afternoon; big, power-folding mirrors; clean, uncluttered and attractive instrument cluster; very comfortable seats; and a well-executed design throughout.



2009 Volkswagen Touareg TDI. Click image to enlarge

If there is going to be much of an issue with the diesel Touareg, it’s probably going to be in the price. Volkswagen says it’s the “most affordable clean diesel SUV in Canada,” but that’s relative. It is less than the diesel versions of the Audi Q7 (\$57,700), Mercedes-Benz ML320 (\$58,900) and GL320 (\$69,000) and BMW X5 xDrive35d (\$62,200), but that doesn’t mean it’s inexpensive, especially since its list of features would probably mean that buyers would more likely compare the \$57,975 Comfortline to those other models.

The two sister brands (Volkswagen and Audi) have done their homework, though, so that buyers must make sacrifices: the Touareg Comfortline includes park sensors, backup camera, Homelink and sunroof (optional on base Q7), plus bi-xenon headlamps (unavailable on the base Q7), and navigation can only be added to the upper-line Q7 Premium, while it’s optional on all Touareg trim lines. Even so, when you’re up around the \$60,000 mark, I’m guessing that many buyers would be inclined to take the more prestigious Audi nameplate over the more everyday Volkswagen badge, even in spite of those missing items.

Still, I don’t think Volkswagen is ever counting on Touareg being a huge percentage of overall sales. And while Canadian diesel owners are a relatively lonely lot, especially when compared to European markets, they tend to be fiercely loyal to their fuel, to the point that a \$4,000 premium that scares off more conservative buyers may simply be considered the price of membership. I’m guessing that unless the economy takes an earth-shattering dive, those initial 200 diesel Touaregs should find their way into new driveways fairly quickly. This is a truly fine engine that certainly deserves to be successful.

Jil McIntosh is a freelance writer, a member of the Automobile Journalists Association of Canada (AJAC) and Assistant Editor for CanadianDriver.com. Her personal website can be found at www.JilMcIntosh.com

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Comments on this article -- 18



Dave says: I’ve been wondering about maintenance costs for the new diesels - particularly the

[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 6:23 am](#)

Danno
says:

[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 7:15 am](#)

cost of replacing the special filter and the urea additives.

Good question Dave. The special oil needed with these engines (synthetic Mobil 1 ESP) at \$12 per liter adds up in a hurry. This engine needs at least 10 liters as well as fuel filter changes highly recommended at each oil change. The \$500 oil change is within reach with this VW. Yes, the oil change interval is probably 16,000 Kms but a lot of gasoline cars are close to that number right now. Something to consider with this new diesel technology.

Roy says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 8:07 am](#)

LOVE that they finally brought the diesel over. Was going to put it on my shopping list as a result until I saw the price tag: \$4k more than the gas engine = \$50k for the BASE version. I thought VW stood for the 'people's car'. I guess the majority of us with average incomes don't qualify as 'people' according to VW.

Todd says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 8:41 am](#)

Speaking of "people", when do we see a TDI Tiggen?

Tom says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 10:11 am](#)

I agree, the price is too steep for VW. I'm a loyal VW driver and was in the market for one of these until last month when I picked up an 08 Mercedes ML320 CDI dealer demo for the price of the base Touareg. Sure it had a few KM on it versus the new car smell of a Touareg, but there's something wrong with that picture.

This VW Diesel guzzles up 15 mpg City and 21 mpg U.S. highway. (on a perfect day)

When are we going to stop converting liters per 100 kms to Imperial mpg, a system of measurement that we haven't used since the early 70's!

eric neville
says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 10:54 am](#)

The VW market in Canada is a drop in the bucket in North America. Any real volume sales for vehicles happens in the, now very mpg conscious U.S. market.

I don't think the overpriced VW Touareg Diesel will be welcomed in this new 'price point' U.S. car market.

And the thought of a \$400.00 oil change would make anyone run screaming from the dealership.

No this is not a "Peoples Car" unless you are a failed Ex-AIG executive still counting your millions of dollars in severance bonuses.

Toronto
says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 11:32 am](#)

and has anyone checked the price of VW parts?

You would think that they are telling you jokes, but no those are real prices. Way above the middle mark. VW is a mistake to own in my opinion unless it's new and you still have warranty. The minute it expires run.

Scott says:
[May 4th, 09](#)
[at 12:21 pm](#)

In a 4 page First Drive of the VW Touareg TDI, there is very little information on why someone should choose the diesel version versus the gas. Considering this is a \$50,000 SUV, and it's diesel, many people would benefit the extra torque and tow a trailer. I can't believe the hitch is a \$700 option. It is difficult

nowadays to find a vehicle that can tow 3,000 lbs, seat 4 people comfortable, and get decent fuel economy. VW should have brought the TDI version of the Tiguan instead. It would sell more, and only make a \$2,500 jump to the diesel version instead of \$4,000. I mean the A3 is coming in Q4, but it can't tow, the Jetta wagon TDI is great, and does not have a \$4,000 gap from the gas version, but it can't tow either.

Onearmed

says:

[May 4th, 09](#)
at 4:21 pm

Parts are not that expensive, just don't go to the dealer. That applies to all car companies.

RET says:

[May 5th, 09](#)
at 5:00 am

I agree that VW needs to import the diesel Tiguan and it should have a six spd manual transmission and all wheel drive. Why are the German companies missing the point on their diesel vehicles as they seem to be bringing the expensive versions to Canada [excepting the VW Jetta]. If Audi, Mercedes-Benz and BMW were to import diesel versions of their smaller cars and sell them for under \$40000 they would sell boat loads.

Elcee says:

[May 5th, 09](#)
at 9:42 am

Message to VW Canada:" No, its the Tiguan Diesel we want first. There are already high priced Diesels available. I though you guys had learned something after the Pheaton.

MEL says:

[May 5th, 09](#)
at 8:11 pm

I've been driving TDIs for over a decade, but I agree, who has 60K for a car these days? I'm not that loyal or that rich.

A diesel Tiguan, 7 seat Passat Wagon or European "Touran" would be a better fit. Volkswagen may be a powerhouse in the world but their success has little to do with their perspective of the North American market.

VW is a joke ! Anyone want a \$100k PHAETON ? There is another joke from VW. Unless you have a "connection" the parts are very expensive. Good luck to those "shade tree mechanics" - you'll require a whole 'nother tool chest full of expensive VW specific tools.

jack daniels says:

[May 15th, 09](#)
at 9:17 pm

VW = People's car = Bull\$hit

JOKES

End of story

VW is a joke? Considering every moron who wants to put down VW only seems to run to the Phaeton as an example is pretty good considering some of the horror stories of other manufacturers. I own a VW and find their parts and service to be on par with most others considering the higher quality you get. Shadetree mechanic? Gone with the dino's. Anyone with an ounce of common sense wouldn't try to diagnose and fix their modern cars, too complicated and dangerous. Anyone who thinks that Volkswagen is the only one with complicated cars has been living in the woods far too long. So jack daniels with your nonsense comments the real joke is on you.

Larry says:

[May 25th, 09](#)
at 1:39 pm

VW if you listen to the feedback from Canadians you will increase your sales dramatically: More Diesel engines in your popular models. Tiguan, Passats and Vans. More manual transmissions.

[at 4:35 pm](#)

jack daniels
says:
[May 25th,](#)

Larry are you kidding...you tellin me aint nobody tinkering with their autos these days other than the dealers??? You can buy OBDII's and diagnose many problems, some aint even problems, just fowled codes. Saves a bundle for the average joe who doesn't have money to burn. Cuz most of us gots mouths to feed and budget constraints.

[09](#)

[at 10:45 pm](#)

By the way, did you ever watch Shade Tree Mechanic back in the day? Taught some simple fixes - O2 sensors and similar are easy to change if you have a half brain and a few minutes to spare. Was a great show for us "DINOS"... You were probably still soiling your diaper back then. Grow up.

jack daniels

says:

[May 25th,](#)

Larry - see you at Yuk Yuks next Sat night?

[09](#)

[at 10:46 pm](#)

john macy
says:

"If you can find a station selling it, the Touareg is certified for B5 biodiesel, as are all of Volkswagen's new Clean Diesel engines".

[Aug 3rd, 09](#)

[at 7:11 am](#)

That is not what I have heard. I understand that 2009 models cannot run B5 due to the new emissions setup. Can you confirm this? Thanks!