

# 4WD BUYERS GUIDE

## VW AMAROK

### MEDIUM UTES



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**The much anticipated VW Amarok ute was released in 2011, albeit only as a crew cab with manual transmission, but it bristles with powertrain and driveline technology.**

Although it has the smallest engine capacity in the crew-cab ute class the Amarok has ample grunt and is physically larger inside and in the cargo tray than HiLux and Navara crew-cab utes. On paper, the VW Amarok's little two-litre diesel looks like a child on an adult mission, but the peak power of 120kW at 4000rpm is respectable and the torque band of 400Nm between a low 1500rpm and 2500rpm is more than respectable.

VW extracts performance from small engines by utilising its TDI technology that combines two turbochargers and common-rail, high-pressure fuel injection. The four-cylinder engine has a relatively small bore of 81mm and quite a long piston stroke of 95.5mm, which are dimensions designed to increase torque, especially when force-fed by a pair of turbos in series. This engine is mated to a six-speed manual transmission and VW's 4Motion low-range transfer case, to provide off-road gearing.

VW's Amarok isn't a cheapie, ranging in RRP from \$43,990 up to \$52,990 for selectable-4WD versions and \$58,990 for the full-time-4WD model. With the 4WD package come aluminium wheels; push-button 4WD engagement; an electronic rear differential locking function; off-road compatible ABS and anti-skid; and traction and stability control.

Other standard equipment across the range includes: hill-holding function, driver and passenger front airbags, side and thorax airbags, remote central locking, three-point belts (height-adjustable front), cargo area light, four cargo tie-down rings, tinted glass, front and rear mudflaps, radio/CD with MP3 double-DIN, climate control air conditioning/heating, folding rear bench seat, height-adjustable driver and front passenger seats and power mirrors and windows.

The Trendline model scores fog lamps, step rear bumper, 16-inch aluminium wheels, four speakers, rear interior light and front map lights, body-coloured bumpers, carpet, trip computer with multifunction display, two additional 12V sockets and cruise control.

The Highline spec' adds: chrome bumper and mirror trim, 18-inch wheels, extended wheel arches, dual-zone aircon, leather wheel rim and gear knob, rear privacy glass, an alarm and six speakers.

The Ultimate equipment list consists of: stainless-steel side steps and sports bar (optional on other models), 19-inch wheels, rear parking assistance, leather upholstery and trim. Full-time-4WD is also fitted.

Our evaluation Amarok was a Trendline model, fitted with optional 18-inch wheels, VW's tow bar and tongue and a seven-pin trailer socket. (The factory tow bar kit is an expensive rip-off, we reckon.)

The Amarok bar is rated for a towed load of 2800kg, with a maximum ball weight of 280kg. Payload varies with the number of occupants and the amount of gear, but is a nominal 970kg. The Ultimate is restricted to 710kg.

The Amarok is noticeably larger than most of its competitors and VW boasts of its ability to accept a pallet in the cargo box. Inside, there's a big-ute feel and the centre console is quite voluminous. Two back seat occupants have lounging room and three average-sized adults aren't squeezed. Height adjustable front seats, infinitely-variable seat back angles and a tilting-telescoping steering column make getting comfortable easy. Controls are European-style (left-side direction indicators), but once used to the layout we had no problems with them. Headlight beam height adjustment is standard, as it should be on every vehicle that tows or carries varying loads.



Vision is excellent, through the big glass areas and large, convex mirrors.

The six-speed's stubby stick and heavily-sprung gate take some getting used to and we found the detent springing away from the first-second plane sometimes meant accidentally picking up third gear to lift off – followed by the inevitable stall. This degree of detent may work in left-hand-drive versions, where the driver is pulling the lever towards the gate, but it's a tad awkward when the action is push-away, as it is with RHD. Other than that quirk, we had no issues with the shifting action.

Hill-holding works on a hill-start by retaining hydraulic pressure in the wheel brake circuit for around three seconds after the pedal is released, allowing ample time for the driver's foot to transfer from brake pedal to accelerator. This feature means there's no need to fiddle around synchronising handbrake release with clutch take-up – handy around town and very handy in steep off-road conditions.



The engine belies its compression-ignition design, with very little noise at idle and through the rev range. Most drivers will inadvertently use too many revs when driving the Amarok, because it's difficult to believe that a little two-litre can have much poke down low, but trust us, this engine does.

With 600kg in the tray and 1500kg of trailer bobbing behind we found that the Amarok could be driven all the time with no more than 2500rpm showing on the rev counter; including when shifting gears.

Cruising at 100km/h in sixth gear saw the engine lolling at 1800rpm and it pulled happily from revs as low as 800rpm, with never a hint of engine stress, clutch shudder or transmission 'growl'.

Solo vehicle fuel consumption worked out around 8.4L/100km in conditions that included stop-start, hill climbing and freeway driving. Loaded and pulling a trailer, at legal maximum speeds where possible, the Amarok averaged 13.5L/100km.



With the trailer uncoupled we headed to our favourite bush tracks for some off-road testing. Before venturing onto fire trails we selected 4WD and then low range, with simple button presses that had instant results – other 4WD makers please take note! It was the same when we selected rear diff lock operation, to handle a very steep, rocky section of track: instant lock engagement. Excellent.



The VW engine loved off-road conditions, where its low-speed torque worked without provoking wheelspin much of the time; just as well, because the Amarok doesn't have class-leading wheelspin control.

While we're making some criticisms the standard shock absorbers are woeful, seeming to lack any bump damping at all. The parabolic leaf springs VW uses at the back end of the Amarok have no interleaf friction, in the interests of a supple ride, so they need powerful shock absorbers to control a heavy live rear axle. On corrugated and potholed surfaces the Amarok danced around irritatingly.

Another problem we encountered was restricted ground clearance of only 192mm, thanks to a heavy protective bash plate under the engine, transmission and front diff.

## Previous Models

Volkswagen made a front wheel drive Caddy ute, based on Golf mechanicals and also marketed the HiLux with a VW badge in Europe in the 1980s, but as far as we know none of these vehicles came to Australia.

## Bush Modifications

The Amarok needs more ground clearance and better quality shock absorbers, so an after-market suspension kit is necessary for serious bush travel.

The standard traction control isn't very effective, so front and rear diff locks would be handy.

After-market canopies, snorkels and bar work are available.



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