

# VW's Amarok *Rocks*

**The much anticipated VW Amarok ute is finally with us, albeit only as a crew cab with manual transmission, but it fairly bristles with powertrain and driveline technology that combine to put it a cut above the rest.**



Although the new VW Amarok has the smallest engine capacity in the crew-cab ute class it has ample grunt and is physically larger inside and in the cargo tray than Japanese-designed crew-cab utes.

The heart of any vehicle is its engine and transmission, because these determine how it performs. 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. Torque is what you need off road and when towing and the Amarok's torque delivery is amazing.



VW extracts great performance from small engines by utilising 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 those versions with VW's 4Motion system have a low-range transfer case to provide off-road gearing.

### On And Off Road

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 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 base model 2WD has a rating of 1040kg and the Ultimate is restricted to 710kg.)

The Amarok is noticeably larger than 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. We didn't need mirror extensions to see down the sides of our test trailer.

### What You Get

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. Those prices make \$33,990 for the 2WD model look quite a bargain. A 10 grand penalty for 4WD may seem lot of money, but VW's 4Motion involves more than just slotting in a transfer case and front diff, a front propshaft and a pair of half shafts. With the 4WD package come aluminium wheels, the best push-button 4WD and diff lock engagement system in the market, an electronic rear differential locking function and 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** 4WD 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** 4WD 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** 4WD 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.



The engine belies its compression-ignition design, with very little noise at idle and through the rev range.

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.

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'.

Economy was almost unbelievable when driven as the designers planned: as a solo vehicle, consumption worked out around 8.4L/100km in conditions that included stop-start, hill climbing and freeway driving. Loaded and pulling the 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.

Fortunately, off-roaders can buy after-market suspension kits already, with upgraded shock absorbers. These kits solve another problem we encountered: restricted ground clearance of only 192mm, thanks to a heavy protective bash plate under the engine, transmission and front diff. A suspension lift of around 50mm would be welcome.



## After Market Gear

ARB was quick off the mark with accessories for the new Amarok, because the company imported a left hand drive model last year, to use as a template for after-market equipment.

ARB obviously picked the standard shock absorbers as a weak link and has developed a range of Nitrocharger Sport dampers for the Amarok, along with OME springs to give it some additional ground clearance. There's also a mechanical Air Locker rear axle differential lock to improve off-road ability.

Bars include a deluxe combination bar and a Sahara bar, with winch capability up to Warn's 9500 models. Both bar types are SRS-compatible.

A mid-roof-height canopy has also been released, with a choice of smooth or grained exterior finish and sliding or lift-up windows. An optional internal bracing system allows canopy-rack loads up to 100kg.

Additional ARB equipment being developed for the Amarok includes side rails and steps, rear step tow bars, a sport lid and under-vehicle protection plates.

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