

2010[60] Skoda ROOMSTER SE TSI 105 S-A DSG 5Dr MPV REVIEW

The foolish could easily dismiss the Roomster as just some novelty niche irrelevance that Skoda could do without. Foolish, because the Roomster represents a milestone in the rejuvenation of the Skoda brand, and is exactly the type of car Skoda needs to be making – cars that show practical needn't mean boring, and cars that are much more than just watered down, re-badged VWs.

It is in fact a model for how platform sharing should work. Yes, there are the economies of scale of lower parts costs and component modularity (the chassis mixes original construction with parts from the Fabia and both new and old Octavia).

But this is combined with intelligent, consumer-focused design. Your preconceptions are most likely informed by the quirky exterior and similarity to MPV-from-a-van rivals from Citroën and Renault, but these are turned on their head by a surprisingly good drive, with genuinely practical design reinforcing this feel-good factor.

You realise that what you thought was either frivolous or functional is useful, enjoyable and desirable.

Where the Skoda Roomster really excels is in the interweave of functionality and originality, a fluid mix that flows throughout the car. In profile, the Roomster's swooping curves and disjointed window lines may appear clumsy and without purpose, but in truth these inject interest and differentiation into a shape that is necessarily boxy and slab sided. The windscreen and pillar treatment, for example, are almost Saab-like.

Likewise, you might reasonably question the mismatched door lines, but the excellent access the higher rear door provides justifies the unusual design. The design is not fault free – the swooping B-pillar exaggerates your blind spot, and the boot door is so long and low-reaching that it can't be opened in restricted spaces. But overall it wins more battles than it loses.

It's interesting to look at the original Roomster concept sketches, though, which show something very different from the van-shaped reality. Much lower and sleeker, they treated the windscreen and front door windows as one piece of glass, and had the driver at the head of what are now the rear side doors' windows. It was more Ferrari Bread van than Skoda people-van. As topological distortions go, it's a big one.

As with its Fabia and Octavia siblings, the Roomster is offered with a pseudo-4x4 Scout option. The ride height is raised by 43mm and plastic cladding replaces the bumpers to complete the off-road look.

The theme of originality continues inside the Roomster where Skoda's interior design and feeling of quality approaches that of offerings from parent VW. While we experienced a few niggling issues with our two test cars – a small buzz emanating from the dash in one, and an ill-fitting glove box in the other, the fit and finish generally exceeded expectations.

There is nothing complex or fussy about the forward cabin, just thoughtfully placed, simple and stylishly designed controls. Our mid-spec Roomster 2 added metal-effect door handles and vent surrounds a welcome contrast with the otherwise sober dash.

Although the front cabin is awash with neat storage ideas, such as the elasticated straps that run across the top of the door bins to secure maps, the real trickery is behind the driver. After you've found the hidden door handles and stepped through the large rear doors, it's immediately obvious how much higher the rear passengers sit than their companions in the front. Assuming you're not sat behind some freakishly tall driver, you should have a clear view of the road ahead, boosting the sense of spaciousness.

Accommodation in the rear consists of two outer chairs that both slide and recline, and a more occasional fixed middle seat (although it does fold forward to act as a centre arm rest, complete with cup holders). Unsurprisingly given the roofline, headroom is capacious, though legroom for adults is merely adequate, the seats' travel limited by rear wheel intrusion. Reclining the seats improves the situation and few will complain over moderate journeys.

If there is a comfort-related criticism, it is that shoulder room is tight, but Skoda has a solution for this as well: if you're travelling four up, remove the middle seat and you can slide the two outer seats inwards for more shoulder room.

With seats up the load capacity is still impressive at 530 litres (just 30 litres less than an Octavia hatch). If you have bigger loads to carry, you can fold down any of the three rear seats. If you need even more room, each unit can be independently pivoted forward and held in position with a bungee cord (which conveniently can also secure items in the boot). Still not enough? Each seat unit can be removed completely to give an uninterrupted flat floor, 400mm of extra load length and a total volume of 1780 litres.

The boot itself offers two bag-hooks, a power outlet, two large side trays, hooks for a luggage net and a bin for loose items or muddy boots. While none of this is individually ground breaking, the practicality count and attention to detail are impressive.

Likewise, each seat control is slick and well placed, our only gripes being the need to slide the seats back before pivoting them forward, and the weight of the seats themselves.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the Skoda Roomster comes with the handling, which surpasses expectations spectacularly even though there is nothing innately special about its strut front, torsion-beam rear suspension.

Subjectively it helps that the driving position is set low, although the seats could do with more support, and that the movement of every major control is smooth, light and well balanced. The Roomster's suspension is firm enough to cope with a payload of 515kg, more than an Octavia estate, yet it doesn't feel that way.

With its long wheelbase and broad track, the Roomster changes direction eagerly, grips admirably and keeps its composure over undulations. Throw in accurate, nicely weighted steering and supple ride over sharp disturbances, and you have a car that delivers more smiles than you would ever expect.

Unfortunately, the modifications to the Roomster Scout scupper this handling ability. The raised ride height contributes to greater body roll, whilst the combination of longer travel suspension and bigger wheels lends the Scout a choppy ride over uneven surfaces.

Today's Skoda brand might not represent the bargain it once did, but the Roomster is a versatile and well-made package – and it's still a good £2500 or more cheaper than a similarly-engined Skoda Yeti, a car which arrived after the Roomster and which some pundits thought might render the subject of this test redundant.

As for fuel economy, our test 1.2 averaged 48.8mpg across our touring route and an economic 36.7mpg overall. If the official fuel figures are a guide (which they often are not), virtually every Roomster in the current range should better that result.

It might look quirky, but this Skoda is with real substance. Bringing MPV versatility, van-like capacity and car-like road manners, the Roomster represents a genuinely new package.

But it doesn't stop at meeting the functional brief. With good design, comfort and entertaining handling, the Roomster is the most innovative product to come from Skoda in recent years

After having test drives in four different manufactures mini MPV's all more or less in the same price bracket, we decided on the Skoda Roomster for the following reasons. (1) Versatility. (2) Headroom (3) Drivability. (4) Value for money.

As has it has been said it is a Marmite car but strangely the external design grows on you and you finding yourself loving it... We have had the Roomster only two months so this is not a long term review.

The Roomster is a car of two halves - or 'rooms' as the Skoda PR machine would have us refer to them. The 'Driving Room' is the area occupied by the driver and front passenger and it feels very much like

that of a conventional family hatchback. The driving position is comfortable, with a good degree of adjustment and much less upright than in most MPV products. Quality materials have also been used and build quality is strong. As you progress rearward, you enter the Roomster's 'Living Room' and it's here that the vehicle's van-like silhouette pays dividends. The roofline steps up, allowing the rear seats to be mounted 46mm higher than those in the front: this boosts the space available to passengers. Leg and headroom are both extremely generous and there's a light, airy feel to the space thanks to the large windows. An optional panoramic glass roof increases this effect with Skoda pointing out that children become bored more quickly if they don't have a good view of the scenery. The rear seating has also been thoughtfully designed. All three sections of the rear bench are individually foldable and removable. They also recline as well as sliding fore and aft so that owners can choose either to maximise passenger legroom or to bump up capacity in the extremely generous boot behind. This boot is accessed through a large tailgate which lifts to reveal a capacity of 450 litres. Then, depending on the position of the rear seats, owners have the option of increasing that cargo space right up to a truly van-like 1,780 litres - which is achieved when all three seats are positioned in the garage at home. All this helps to open up a wide range of potential interior configurations for the Roomster - a real strength when it comes to meeting the varying needs of modern families

The seats are firm but comfortable also the same for the suspension which is on the firm side but deals with our potholed roads with aplomb, also cornering with such a high car is good with little or no lean. The car is light and airy with the panoramic roof and the interior design is simple but pleasing. The dashboard design is simple but well designed and all the controls are placed in logical order and simple to find. We decided on this car because we have 2 medium sized dogs and the boot is cavernous. Should you wish to carry a big load the seats individually can be folded down or removed completely. My only complaint is that the rear middle is only ½ a seat suitable only for a child, but it can be folded down to make an arm rest/ cup holder.

Drivability drives well and acceleration is very good. Recently I took it down to Somerset covering a total of 470 miles of M20, M25, M3, A303 with the usual stop go problems of dual carriage way going into single lane and other A and B roads whilst I was down there and achieved 47MPG. At one point on the M3 I thought I was traveling at 70 MPH but looked down to the speedometer and was doing 90mph, heavy boot off accelerator very quickly.

The build quality is superb everything is well screwed and glued together also I found the dealers are very informative and are able to answer any questions you have about their product and leave you alone so you can make up your mind on the right vehicle is right for you.

The Roomster has always looked a really well thought-out product. It is what it is and if you're after a stylish way to move the family about and want to maximise practicality and space while retaining a decent driving experience, the Roomster is a very capable and affordable option and will definitely appeal.

Verdict: Best thing since sliced bread!

5/5

Practicality	★★★★★	5.0/5
Reliability	★★★★★	5.0/5
Running cost	★★★★★	5.0/5
How it drives	★★★★★	5.0/5