

2010 Volkswagen Tiguan S

Contributed by John Birchard / Birchard Photos

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We are told the name "Tiguan" is a combination of tiger and iguana. It sounds like the product of the end of a long, hard week in the Volkswagen marketing department. ("Oh, what the hell, Fred. It's almost quitting time. Let's go with Tiguan.") If you think I'm joking, someday ask one of Ford's marketing people how the minivan Freestar got its name! Tiguan may not make a lot of sense, but the compact wagon to which it's applied is eminently sensible. It even qualifies as fun, a term not often associated with crossover vehicles or compact SUVs or whatever the current jargon is for a wagon like this. The Tiguan is meant to compete with the Honda CR-V, Toyota RAV-4, Nissan Rogue and Subaru Forester. The Tiguan is a front-wheel drive (AWD is available) vehicle with four doors and a rear hatch. The engine is the now-familiar VW 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder direct injection powerplant that produces 200 horsepower at 5,100 rpm and 206 foot/pounds of torque at 1,700 rpm. It's mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission that can be shifted manually. The EPA estimates this combination can produce 18 mpg in the city and 24 on the highway. VW recommends premium gas "for maximum performance". The price of a Tiguan is a tad higher than the competition. The base S version starts at \$23,200 and the top-of-the-line SEL 4Motion with automatic transmission goes for \$33,215. I tested the S with automatic. Manufacturer's suggested retail price was \$24,300 and the total was \$25,900, with 17-inch alloys (\$400), Bluetooth connectivity (\$400) and a destination charge of \$800. Here's what you get for your money: four-wheel disc brakes w/ ABS, Electronic Stabilization Control (ESC), the standard array of airbags, air conditioning, 8-way manual driver's and passenger's seat with lumbar control (the passenger seat folds flat), tilt-and-telescope steering wheel, cruise control, 60/40 split folding, reclining and sliding rear seat with fold-flat capability, electronic push-button parking brake, AM/FM radio with single CD player, MP3 format capability and auxiliary input, power windows, power side mirrors with side blinkers, variable intermittent windshield wipers, front and rear carpeted floor mats. In the interests of full disclosure, I am in general a fan of Volkswagens. From the Golf to the CC, I've found the products from Wolfsburg fun to drive, distinctive in their styling and the interiors are among the best in the industry. I also recognize that VW has had some reliability issues, but that they are being dealt with. So I was looking forward to a week with the Tiguan, to see how VW defines a compact SUV. The test car showed up looking sharp in Reflex Silver Metallic with the Charcoal Cloth interior. I was a little surprised that the Tiguan was smaller than expected (overall length is 174.3 inches on a wheelbase of 102.5). It really is a compact SUV. But passenger space is not squeezed. There's plenty of headroom front and back and legroom in the rear is enhanced by rear seats that slide fore and aft and recline as well. Technically, it has seating capacity for five, but four is more realistic. Cargo space is tight, especially with the rear seat backs upright (23.8 cubic feet expands to 56.1 cubic feet with the second row down). The layout of the driver's cockpit is straightforward and controls are intuitive. Operating the climate control is simple and, wonder of wonders on a German car, there is one knob that turns the radio on and off and controls volume. A second knob actually allows one to meander up and down the dial. If you want to pre-set stations, you tune to the station you want and push one button — voila! — it's done. How quaint. Other manufacturers could learn from this. Interior fit-and-finish is first rate, despite the liberal use of plastics in the execution. The cloth-covered seats are comfortable and supportive. The levers on the sides of the front seats jack up the seat height or lower it manually as needed. Simple and useful. Exterior styling is clean and modern. I expect the design will age well as it contains no fad notions. The Tiguan bears a close family resemblance to the Golf, Passat and other VW products, which is no bad thing. Another Volkswagen "family" trait is crisp handling. The Tiguan is no sports car, but it handles responsively on its four-wheel independent suspension. You get the confident feeling it will stick to the road so long as you don't violate the laws of physics. The turbocharged inline four provides brisk acceleration (0-60 mph in 7.8 seconds and an electronically-limited top speed of 131 mph, according to the company) and strong passing power. At idle, you feel the slight roughness of a four-cylinder engine, but nothing objectionable. The 6-speed automatic transmission shifts smoothly and quickly — both in the auto and manual mode. The cabin is quiet at highway speeds. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has determined that the Tiguan performed well in crash tests, rating it with five stars, its top score, in frontal and side crashes and four stars in rollover protection. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety rated the Tiguan as "good" in its crash tests. **THINGS WE LIKE ABOUT THE VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN** -- For a tall wagon, the Tiguan has best-in-class handling -- It's a good compromise -- decent gas mileage and decent performance -- The overall build quality -- There's an actual tuning knob for the radio **THINGS WE DON'T LIKE ABOUT THE VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN** -- Cargo space is quite limited with the second row of seats upright -- No power liftgate -- The name is silly, although "Camry" is sorta weird, too, if you think about it

Volkswagen stands behind the Tiguan with a five-year/60,000-mile powertrain warranty, a vehicle warranty of three years or 36,000 miles and an anti-corrosion warranty of 12 years and unlimited distance. It has a roadside assistance program for the first three years or 36,000 miles, and a no-charge scheduled maintenance program for the same time and mileage limit.

You can make jokes about the name Tiguan, but if you're in the market for a compact SUV, the Volkswagen entry is worth serious consideration. True, the base price for a Tiguan is a couple thousand dollars higher than those of the Honda CR-V and Toyota RAV-4, but the fun-to-drive quotient is higher in the VW . . . and it does stand out from the crowd. Those qualities are worth it if you enjoy driving.

