



The 2013 Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid adds a number of key features that help maximize aerodynamic efficiency and minimize road resistance.

By Steve Schaefer

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I just had a chance to try the new Volkswagen Jetta Hybrid. You heard that right. Now, besides

the standard gasoline and TDI Diesel models, there's a gasoline/electric hybrid model, and it's very good indeed.

The Jetta sedan is just about the perfect size of car for most people. It's a spacious ride, but doesn't take up too much of the road. It is trim and sharp, and was redone in 2011 with Americans especially in mind. It is built, conveniently, in Mexico, so the corporate import taxes are less — making prices lower, too.

The Hybrid model is brand new for 2013. It comes in four ascending levels: Base, SE, SEL and SEL Premium. I was lucky enough to get the top level. If you want the plain version, you'll have to special order it.

The Hybrid looks like a "normal" Jetta, except for a few small items. It has a blue logo (blue is "green" in the automotive world, for some reason). It also wears special badging and specific wheels and grille.

There are other things, though, under the skin, that make the Hybrid unique in the Jetta universe. The airflow is specially controlled for ventilation coming under the hood. There are many aerodynamic changes, including a rear spoiler, front air dam, and, where you can't see them, various underbody devices to smooth the air around the car. This makes for a lower coefficient of drag (just .28), which is all part of improving miles-per-gallon figures.

The experience of driving a hybrid vehicle is pretty much the same everywhere. The car uses a gasoline engine and an electric motor to move down the road. The engine in the Volkswagen is much like that in a Toyota Prius, working much of the time but letting the electric motor take over when it's a good time to do so. Sometimes the engine and the motor work together, sometimes it's the gasoline engine only. The car's computer controls it. Interesting that the electric motor, like the gas engine, is water cooled.

The driving experience is not diminished, as the 140-horsepower gas engine and the 27-horsepower motor are enough to move the car along without struggle.



You can monitor your driving efficiency right on the dash. The left gauge in the Hybrid is configured to be a "Power Meter" rather than a tachometer. It starts out at zero, and then goes through a "green regenerator" section, followed by a zero, for when the gauge starts moving. There's a blue section after that showing the best times to be driving, monitoring both gas and

electricity. After that is a section of the gauge that shows engine activity only. At the far reaches of the gauge is the boost mode, for when you're using boost and high-tailing it — not worrying about fuel efficiency.

This is a hybrid for turbo fans, as it says on the window sticker. One doesn't think of boost with a Prius, but the Jetta Hybrid offers some exciting performance potential. The small, single-spool turbocharger and intercooler are neatly integrated. The electric motor and clutch are partnered for efficiency, too. The car puts out a maximum of 170 horsepower and 184 lb.-ft. of torque at as low as 1,000 rpm when engine and motor are working, so you get smooth acceleration.

To prove that the Jetta is no ordinary hybrid, VW took it to the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah for testing last October. A modified car set a number of records, and holds the H/PS class record — for production-based cars with engines of less than 1.5 liters that use forced induction — at 186.313 mph, as well as the highest top speed ever recorded for a hybrid, 187.607 mph.

Efficiency? How does an EPA average of 45 mpg sound? I averaged 40.1 mpg during my test week. It's interesting that the TDI Diesel Jetta I tested a couple of years ago (and a recent TDI Beetle) earned just over that — 42 mpg. VW now has more than one way to tackle the fuel economy issue.

This is an extremely clean car — with a 9 for Smog and a 10 for Greenhouse Gas, it earns the SmartWay Elite status from the EPA. See fuelconomy.gov for more detailed information on the

Jetta Hybrid — and every other car you can buy today.

The Jetta sedan is VW's entry-level car in the U.S. market, but the Hybrid is not that model. That's the basic Jetta, which starts at \$17,515. The special-order base Hybrid model begins at \$25,790. My SEL Premium model came to \$32,010. All prices include \$795 for shipping.

The Jetta has changed over the years, but today's model is sharp looking, fun to drive, and offers various ways to drive efficiently — and have fun doing it.