

2006 Volkswagen GTI
Studying the Thesaurus for Superlatives....
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For: The Wheel

The VW team that engineered the new GTI must feel like a proud, collective papa as they release the fifth generation of this beloved marque. It might bring tears to one's eyes, driving this refined, fast, smooth, roomy and economical hatchback, knowing its heritage as a feisty, loud, quick but not fast, compact brat/car. The GTI is all grown up – but that doesn't mean it's not good!! Because at \$25,000, in world of \$40,000 and up performance cars, not only is it a contender, but one that is at least a possible stretch for many Americans. Frankly, the phrase “steal of the century” comes to mind, but we shouldn't use it, as the VW marketing department may somehow stumble on to this article and take all our fun away by bumping the price. The 2006 GTI is a smokin' deal for those sporting drivers who have lives, kids, college loan payments, or just common sense when it comes to cars.



Your first impression of the GTI will be its nouveau looks, with the controversial VW/Audi Heinz ketchup label nose. Beyond the proboscis, this two door hatchback is a crisp, clean style, if not sexy – but sexiness is not what the GTI is about. The rounded box shape contains within it enough room to start a whole new series of elephant jokes. (Remember, those – how many elephants can you get in a Volkswagen?) The cloth front seats, upholstered in today's most popular plaid cloth (?), are excellent in providing support and comfort simultaneously. Bolsters are there but not obtrusive – thigh support is great and with a manual 6 way adjuster, a tilt and telescoping steering wheel, no one should be left out of the chorus of superlatives for the proper driving position. As we cruised up Highway 29 on a day trip, I felt the headroom above me and realized that the boys at the chop shop could have a field day with the GTI. There was at least 4 inches of headroom above where my head rested – allowing for future chopped GTI's in the July 4th parade....or maybe I'll just get a 10 gallon hat to fill the space. Thanks to the car's shape, the back seat is very respectable for both headroom and legroom, considering we are in a compact two door hatchback. The driver and passenger doors are long, creating good ingress egress to the rear, however watch out in parking lots as these could be weapons of door-ding destruction.

Here is where I ran out of superlatives. You can fill in the blank on this one – the sunroof controls on VWs and Audis are (superlative here). A twist knob allows you to easily reach up without looking and turn the knob one direction as far as you want the sunroof opened. Turn it in the opposite direction and it does the tilt-up function instead. And...if you're wanting to go windows down and sunroof wide open, you can hold the control all the way back and the unit will retract all the way out of sight, letting in all the moon/sunrays that you desire. If you're listening automotive world – please infringe on this idea! Even if it is patented – its one of those little ergonomic simplicities that makes this car so much fun to be in.

OK class...we need another (superlative here) (hint - really, really good) describes this car's overall drivability. The specifics on the cars mechanics look like this:

Engine: 2.0 liter, 200 horsepower, 207 foot pounds of torque, turbocharged inline four – with direct injection

- Front wheel drive
- McPherson strut sport (read stiffer than stock) suspension
- Multi-link independent rear suspension
- Electronic stabilization (ESP)
- Electronic Differential lock (this is key to quick in the twisties)
- Anti lock brakes – four wheel discs (and, yes they painted the non-Brembo calipers red – can't win 'em all)
- Optional: 6-speed Direct Shift Gearbox (DSG)

So, this is a pretty standard sporty car combination, right? Well, yes – but the art of building a car is in the meshing of components into a package, and this is a (superlative here) package!! My word would be pretty simple....outstanding. Turbo lag? Nope – not a bit of hesitation. The GTI is the first turbo that I've ever said delivers linear pull. Torque steer? (for novices, this is a tendency of many front drive cars to pull the steering wheel out of your hands as the two front halfshafts battle for control of forward thrust) Absolutely none. Heretofore I have to admit to a great anti-front drive bias, fed by bushels of torque steer from many cars I've driven. Take torque steer away, which VW has in the GTI, and I simply don't mind being pulled instead of pushed. Sluggish shifts from the “automatic” transmission? No way – the DSG with its twin clutch discs hustling shifts, is just flat amazing – and even more (superlative here) is the fact that this gearbox shifts so fast, the analog tachometer actually struggles to swing fast enough as the progression of gears occurs. We WILL see digital tachs become the norm as these gearboxes take over the market. And having recently developed a touch of the old arthrititis in my left knee, this DSG is all of the sudden looking very appealing. And it's in a \$25,000 car!! This is a TREMENDOUS value.

Take all these goodies and what is the driving experience like? Look in the dictionary under “pocket rocket” and you'll see the GTI picture in color. This a very, very, quick car. Measured subjectively on some area freeway ramps, it gave nothing away to many other cars that are more famous for raw accelerationWith a 0-60 around 7.0 seconds, it doesn't win the numbers game, but that's a drag race from a dead stop, not the real world. Once the turbo is lit and taking advantage of the fast shifts, the GTI boogies quickly enough to get the enthusiasts' heart pumping. Handling is a very nice balance for a

sports hatchback. The ride is firm but not harsh – and overall twisty management is excellent, with a tendency to nose dive just a bit as a possible area for improvement. In the end the VW engineers got the package right – especially at \$25K. While you might choose (superlative here), we say hoorah for sporting cars like the GTI that deliver fun that is at least within reach of many mortals in America.