
In the rear-view mirror: the Golf sets off

The first VW Golf rolled off the production line in Wolfsburg 50 years ago today, on March 29, 1974. At the time, nobody could have guessed that the successor to the legendary Beetle would become the most successful Volkswagen and still the best-selling car in Europe today. In Germany, the compact car even gave its vehicle class its name, and also an entire generation. Over 37 million vehicles have now been built. In purely mathematical terms, this means that over 2000 people have opted for a Golf every single day of the last 50 years. Today, Volkswagen is celebrating its birthday - and the beginning of the future of this world bestseller with an extensive technical and visual update.

As the successor to the legendary Beetle, of which more than 21.5 million were built, the Golf designed by Giorgio Giugiaro and Volkswagen Design had to meet the great expectation of continuing the success story of the world's most successful car to date. In 1974, Volkswagen wrote about the new model with its large tailgate: "The Golf offers maximum usable space and safety. It is uncompromisingly geared towards practicality. The low beltline makes it clearly arranged, the sloping hood provides a view of the road right up to just in front of the car. The low-slung rear window makes reversing easy." The calculation worked out: The modern drive concept of the transverse-mounted front engine, which had been introduced shortly before with the Scirocco and Passat, as well as the variable interior and the new design won over customers. The one millionth model was built in October 1976.

More than 20 million Golfs were built at the main plant, while the remaining 17 million were built at other German sites and in plants in Belgium, Brazil, China, Malaysia, Mexico, Slovakia and South Africa. In this sense too, the Golf is a world car.

Volkswagen also initiated the dynamization of the compact class with the first Golf GTI (1976). The Golf D (1976) and the later Golf GTD (1982) ensured the breakthrough of the diesel in the compact segment. And in 1979, Volkswagen brought a breath of fresh air to the compact class with the Golf Cabriolet - at times the best-selling open-top car in the world. By 1983, a total of 6.9 million units of the first generation Golf had been produced, including all derivatives. The successor introduced technologies such as the regulated catalytic converter, ABS and all-wheel drive. By 1991, 6.3 million Golf IIs had been produced.

With the Golf III, Volkswagen ushered in a new era of safety from August 1991. On the one hand, it was the first model in the series to be available with front airbags from 1992; on the other hand, however, major advances in the area of body design led to a significant improvement in crash characteristics. Further model milestones are associated with the 4.8 million units: for example, the first six-cylinder engine (VR6), cruise control and the first side airbags. This Golf was also available as a Variant for the first time.

The Golf IV presented in 1997 was a major leap forward, particularly in terms of value, and was also the basis for a particularly sporty version. In 2003, the 250 km/h R 32 was also the first Volkswagen to be equipped with a dual-clutch gearbox (DSG). In the same year, after 4.9 million units of the fourth generation, the Golf V was launched on the market. For the first time, it had up to eight protective airbags on board. In addition, the Golf V, of which 3.4 million had been built by 2008, scored points with a new four-link rear axle, bi-xenon headlights and the first seven-speed direct-shift gearbox (DSG).

This was followed by a further 3.6 million sixth-generation Golfs in just four years up to the end of July 2012. At the time, it passed the Euro NCAP crash test with flying colors and featured technologies such as automatic high beam control, parking and hill start assist and DCC adaptive chassis control. As a reward for its efforts, it was awarded the title of "World Car of the Year" in 2009 as one of the most advanced compact cars.

Less weight and lower fuel consumption was the credo when Golf number seven was launched in September 2012. It was up to 100 kilograms lighter than its predecessor,

which consumed up to 23 percent more fuel. The new technologies included the multi-collision brake, adaptive cruise control and the Front Assist area monitoring system including city emergency braking function. The first e-Golf also came onto the market in 2014. By 2019, 6.3 million Golf VIIIs had been produced.

The current Golf VIII has been continuing the success story with new mild and plug-in hybrid drives since October 2019. It was one of the first compact cars to enable assisted driving with its "Travel Assist". More than one million units have been sold to date. This year will see the launch of the next evolutionary stage, Generation 8.1, which is even more in tune with the digital age with voice control via Chat-GPT, among other features. (aum)

Images for article



On March 29, 1974, Volkswagen began production of the first Golf in Wolfsburg.

Photo: Autoren-Union Mobilität/Volkswagen



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Eight generations of VW Golf (1974-2024).

Photo: Autoren-Union Mobilität/Volkswagen
