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2011 Volkswagen Touareg

The 2011 Volkswagen Touareg brings the first complete redesign of VW's highly capable luxury and the brand's first gasoline-electric hybrid to North America.

Models for the all-new 2011 Touareg are delineated by engine: the VR6 with a 3.6-liter V6, the V6 TDI diesel (turbocharged direct injection), and the Hybrid. The Hybrid pairs a NiMH battery under the cargo deck with an electric motor and 3-liter supercharged gasoline V6, and can clear 35 mph on electric alone.

Our estimates for power output and fuel economy: 280 hp, 265 lb-ft of torque with 15/20 mpg for the VR6; 225 hp/406 lb-ft with 18/26 mpg for the TDI, and 375 hp/428 lb-ft with 25/21 mpg for the Hybrid.

All come with a new eight-speed automatic transmission, 4MOTION all-wheel drive and can tow 7,700 pounds; we expect the 4XMOTION off-road four-wheel drive will be offered on some models later.

Coil-sprung independent suspension is standard and air suspension with variable ride height optional. Brakes are all-disc with a full suite of traction, stability, and hill descent assists. Regardless of powertrain we think every Touareg will feel quicker because of the added transmission gears and the diet that removed about 450 pounds.

Although it's a subtle redesign every outside panel, piece and lamp is new and the Touareg is even more rigid than its predecessor. Touareg has a lower, tapering roofline but is wider and longer overall; it's also considerably more aerodynamic. The horizontal-themed grilles remain, framed by LED running lights and bi-Xenon headlamps; at the tail more curves and styled exhaust outlets distinguish the all-new 2011 version.

Increased dimensions also apply to the cabin, which remains a five-passenger configuration but adds six inches longitudinal travel and recline to the rear seats; the rear floor still has the upward angle more comfortable than a flat pad. Everything has been restyled to add luxury without complication, rather like an Audi cabin without so many curves.

A 7-inch screen centered in the instruments supplies vehicle data and, if equipped, turn-by-turn navigation directions. The navigation system uses an 8-inch touch-screen in dash-center that also handles entertainment, including a 60gb HDD with 18gb allotted to audio and video, a DVD/CD player, satellite radio and links, and 3D mapping for buildings, topography and directions.

We expect the Touareg will offer a full-panel moonroof, four-camera Area View camera system, real wood and leather, nine airbags, automatic-ranging headlamps, lane and blind spot assist, active cruise control and emergency braking, and Proactive occupant protection that closes windows and roof and tensions seatbelts if it detects an impending collision.

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