

# Lyons on Wheels

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

## 2023 Volkswagen Golf R 2.0T

**MSRP: \$44,290 As Tested: \$46,185**



Hot hatchbacks have been around for years. The recipe for the breed calls for compact practicality, mixed with sports car handling. Based on the Golf hatchback, the GTI has been Volkswagen's main entry in this market niche for decades. Periodically, VW has also offered limited runs of higher performing hatches like our test car this week – the Golf R.

The eighth generation Golf hatchback appeared in 2022. While the standard version isn't imported to the states, we do get two high performance variants – the Golf GTI (MSRP: \$29,880) and the Golf R (\$44,290). Golf R is offered one way – loaded. Buyer choices are few, most notably color (white, black, blue) and transmission (6-speed manual or optional, 7-speed automatic). I'd love to say that I drove the stick (to me, a manual transmission in an enthusiast car makes for a more sporting drive), but my Lapiz Blue Metallic test car was equipped with the automatic. That said, the VW DSG unit is a good one. You pick up an added (7th) gear, and if you choose to shift it yourself in manumatic mode, the lag between paddle shifted request and actual gear change is fairly quick. Opting for the DSG also increases power. The 2.0L turbo four engine is rated at 315 h.p. and 280 lb.-ft. of torque with the stick, 315/295 with DSG. Weighing just under 3,500 lb., the Golf R can make the trip from 0-60 in the low four second range. It's sneaky fast, which is worth keeping in mind, if you value your license.



*Photos courtesy of the manufacturer*



All Golf R's are All-Wheel Drive. It's a sophisticated system, which includes a torque vectoring rear differential, to enhance handling. Its benefits would be best felt on an autocross or at a track day. Absent that, I can report that the car provides Velcro-like cornering. Drivers choose from multiple drive modes, which tailor driving dynamics for different conditions. Suspensions in all performance cars are tuned stiff to optimize handling. In Golf R, Comfort mode is the mildest setting, and predictably, the car rides firm, with impact harshness noted when you hit broken pavement. If you choose to run your "R" year 'round, you'll need to invest in a set of all-season tires for the winter months. EPA fuel economy estimates for Golf R are 23/30/36 (auto), 20/28/23 (manual). I logged 22 mpg's overall.

Being a hatchback, Golf R's cargo capacity is usefully large, ranging from 19.9 - 34.5 cubic feet. With six footers up front, like-size passengers can only fit in back, if those in row one shorten up on their leg room. Sliding behind the wheel, Golf R offers a fine driving position. Heated and ventilated, the high back sport seats hold the driver nicely during spirited driving. The flat-bottom steering wheel is fat and grippy. Based on past GTI's that I've driven, I suspect that the hand-to-shifter ergonomics are good for those who pick a stick. The weak point in the cabin design is the switchgear. Much of it is accessed via touch controls and sliders. The layout isn't intuitive, and the process of changing settings is slower than it would be with actual buttons and dials, instead of the virtual controls.

VW is also offering a Golf R 20th Anniversary Golf R edition in 2023 (MSRP: \$44,940/\$45,740). The limited run of 1,800 cars – all sunroof delete – will be shod with model-specific, gloss black 19" wheels, fitted with carbon fiber interior trim, and wearing special, "R" badging.

*A 40 year resident of the Capital District, Dan Lyons is the author of six automotive books, and photographer of more than 200 calendars.*