

# Lyons on Wheels

by Dan Lyons • *Special to The Daily Gazette*

## 2024 Volkswagen Taos

MSRP: \$23,995 (S) As Tested: \$35,260 (SEL)



Introduced in the 2022 model year, Taos is the entry level offering in Volkswagen SUV lineup, which also includes Tiguan, Atlas Cross Sport, Atlas and ID.4. The subcompact Sport Ute is offered in three trim levels – S, SE, and SEL, like my test car.

S and SE trim levels are Front Wheel Drive, with All Wheel Drive available optionally (\$2,340 (S), \$1,450 (SE)). SEL trim cars are strictly AWD, which VW calls 4Motion. Regardless of trim, all Taos models run the same engine: a 1.5L four. The turbocharged motor is rated at 158 horsepower @ 5,500 rpm, and 184 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,750-4,000 rpm. It's a lively feeling engine, capable

of going from 0-60 mph in the mid to high 7-second range. Taos models equipped with FWD employ a 7-speed, dual clutch automatic, while FWD models use an 8-speed automatic. The 1.4L offers very solid fuel economy. EPA predicts 24/32/27 (AWD) and 28/36/31 (FWD). My AWD tester rang up 28 mpg's in a week of mixed, city/highway driving.

So, while you may sacrifice a few MPG's if you opt for AWD, the offsetting benefits are twofold. First, your traction improves in wintry driving conditions. An increase in that area often leads to a decrease in driving stress. The other factor is mechanical. AWD equipped Taos run with a different, rear suspension than do FWD versions. The multilink design is more refined than the torsion-beam setup, and makes for a tighter handling, smoother riding car. You won't mistake a Taos for a GTI – VW's revered, hot hatchback – but the small Ute corners capably and rides nicely.

The interior has a straight forward design, and Taos is roomy for its class. Six footers can (just) fit in back behind six footers in front – something that can't be said about



*Photos are courtesy of the manufacturer.*



all subcompact SUV's. Cargo capacity is quite good for the segment, ranging from 25-63 cu.-ft., depending on how you configure the seats. (Add three cubic-feet to those numbers for FWD models). Rear seatbacks fold mostly flat. So positioned, they sit slightly higher than the rest of the load floor. Lifterover in back for loading/unloading is comfortably low.

The front cabin has a clean layout. Technology and luxury features can be added as desired by trim level and option sheet. I like simplicity when it comes to system controls, and Taos scores well in that regard. HVAC adjustments are made in mid-dash panel of three dials and surrounding buttons – easy to use and non-distracting. The center touchscreen is 6.5" on S; 8" on SE and SEL. The infotainment system is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto; the connection is wireless on SE and SEL. Top trim SEL's like my tester are well appointed, with standard features like leather seating surfaces, Ventilated front seats, panoramic moon roof, upgraded audio system and a digital dash display. The latter is configurable, so you can - for example - cast the navigation system's map onto the gauge cluster. That makes it easy to scan, without taking your eyes far from the road.

With a model refresh due next year, VW is ringing out the current gen with a special edition - Taos SE Black. The blackout treatment is applied to paint, wheels, roof and dark trim elements on the exterior, the dash, and an illuminated front grille. Regardless of color, Taos is deserving of a place on your shortlist, if you're shopping the subcompact SUV segment.

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