

It shouldn't surprise anyone to learn that Czech supermodel Hana Soukupova has long legs, it rather goes with the territory. What may surprise people is that the streets of Prague are apparently so overrun with leggy supermodels that Škoda, the Czech Republic's other main export, has decided to build a car just for them — the Superb.

The Superb model name may sound a touch boastful, but it pays homage to the company's flagship from the 1930s and 1940s — so you can forgive the company somewhat. The Superb name was resurrected in 2001, and we now see it in its second generation.

Škoda is a subsidiary of the Volkswagen Group. So, in line with the latter's policy, there are some shared components in the Superb: The chassis features modular elements of the Golf and Passat platforms, and there are Volkswagen Group engines and gearboxes under the bonnet.

But that does not mean Škoda is restricted to making Volkswagen clones — the Superb may share some of the parts you don't see, but a lot of what you do see is the work of the Czech company. The patented "twin door" variable boot opening is a good example of that — open the boot using just the central latch and you get a standard bootlid that is hinged below the rear window, but if you touch the latch to the right first, the tailgate is hinged from above the rear window as with a hatchback. All the advantages of a hatchback, but without the stigma — clever.

For Singapore, the entry-level model comes with the workhorse 1.8-litre TSI engine that you'll find across the Volkswagen and Audi ranges, and it is mated to the latest seven-speed Direct Shift Gearbox (DSG).

Need help parking?

The test vehicle was the top-of-the-line 3.6 FSI V6, with a six-speed DSG and per-

Living up to its name

Tony Watts dreams of taking the Škoda Superb out for a spin with supermodels

manent all-wheel drive — the 1.8-litre model is front-wheel drive only — plus, all the possible bells and whistles are included. The 3.6 FSI V6 includes 18-inch alloy wheels, satellite navigation, 10-channel touch-screen audio system, Bi-Xenon headlamps with Adaptive Front Lighting and Parking Assistant.

The last two capabilities warrant special mention. The Adaptive Front Lighting system not only turns the headlamps into bends, it also changes the shape and spread of the light beam to suit the driving conditions — between 15kph and 50kph the light beam is spread for better lighting on the edge of the road, go beyond 90kph and the beams are raised for extended visibility.

Parking Assistant doesn't just help you parallel park the Superb, it actually does the job for you. Simply activate the system next to the first of the

two vehicles you wish to park between, drive ahead a bit and engage reverse. The system actually steers the vehicle into the parking space — it is a totally weird sensation watching the steering wheel spin around on its own in front of you. I couldn't help but ride the brake pedal throughout the process since the system really cuts the margins fine.

On the move, the large-capacity V6 makes itself felt, with strong acceleration from standstill until you're well into speeding-ticket territory. The excellent sound-insulation means that the engine doesn't make itself heard at all until the upper reaches of the rev-range.

The six-speed DSG is as good as ever with super-smooth shifts while paddles behind the chunky three-spoke steering wheel are available if you wish to take over the gear-changing duties. From an operator's perspective it may as well be a standard automatic transmission, except that it has the efficiency of a manual gearbox, because ultimately, that's what it is.

Call your supermodel friends

This is easily the best of the automated manual gearboxes that I have

sampled, though other manufacturers are introducing dual-clutch automated manuals these days. While the strong power, slick gearbox, and even the small steering wheel point towards a sporting drive, the Superb's raison d'être is more to do with transporting your supermodel friends in comfort. There is a huge amount of legroom available for the rear-seat passengers — at 4,838mm, the Superb is in 5 Series and E-Class territory for overall length.

At 1.88m, I'm actually the same height as Hana Soukupova, and roughly twice as wide. So, if you could fit two of me comfortably in the rear, you could technically have four supermodels at the back, though my head did touch the headlining because of the relatively high seat base.

The quantity of rear legroom is obvious from the Superb's exterior — it looks as though the whole glasshouse has been stretched when seen from the side. It looks handsome enough from the front and rear quarters, and in this second generation it does get a look that is more Škoda and less Volkswagen.

One carry over from the Volkswagen Group is the quality of fit and finish, which means very smooth paint, nice even shut-lines for the exterior and excellent (should I say superb?) materials and fit inside, though I'm not convinced of the need for a chrome strip across the speaker in the door proclaiming "Sound System".

Still, if that's the only niggle I could find, the Superb really is living up to its name — it is large, refined, well made and packed with gadgets.

Its capacity for supermodels aside, the other great thing about Superb ownership is that nobody will ever be able to dispute your claim that you're a Superb driver. **E**

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ŠKODA SUPERB V6 3.6

\$128,800 inc COE
 Engine: 3,580cc 24V V6
 Power/torque: 260hp/350Nm
 0-100kph: 6.5 seconds
 Top speed: 250kph



The Škoda Superb test drive car was the top-of-the-line 3.6 FSI V6, with a six-speed DSG and permanent all-wheel drive