



CAR REVIEW

Czech it out

Skoda's Octavia VRS hits all the right notes for a mid-sized Continental car

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SKODA has come a long way. Once a byline for jokes about reliability (or, rather, lack thereof), the Czech carmaker has — under the Volkswagen Group — developed a reputation for quality, its conservative styling notwithstanding.

And now, Skoda is slowly becoming something even more exciting.

In their song *Check It Out*, The Beastie Boys offer the following advice for those who just want to rock out: "Sport that fresh attire, tonight we goin' out, set the town on fire."

Whether the good folks at Skoda are fans of the Beastie Boys or not, they've

done exactly that, giving the Octavia a brand new look, interior and drivetrain.

The ho-hum styling of the old car deprived it of mojo. This time, it's a different story. Like the Superb, the Octavia gets swoopy front lights and big apertures, making it look more aggressive. Which is fitting, since the VRS is the performance-oriented model, compared to its 1.4-litre sibling.

The 17-inch wheels and red brake callipers hint at this, too, and the car looks great in both station wagon form (seen here) or as a regular hatchback.

Those looks aren't just for show either. Under the hood is the tried-and-tested drivetrain from the previous-generation Golf GTI: The 200bhp 2.0-litre turbocharged engine that is mated to a six-speed dual-clutch transmission.

It endows the Octavia VRS with stunning straight-line speed and high-performance charm, too. Think of it as the GTI wagon that Volkswagen never made.

It doesn't handle as sharply as that legendary hot-hatch but it's no slouch either: The chassis is taut and the car corners crisply without horseplay, although it feels a bit reluctant to turn in hard cornering. Other minor complaints are the distant steering and slightly jittery ride.

In any case, the VRS doesn't set out to be a hot hatch. The engine, while spot-

on for performance, is relatively quiet. Likewise, the cabin is well-insulated and well-built.

It now gets the stamp of German-quality all over: Sturdy buttons and levers, and tons of space. Plus, the 585 litres of boot space expands to a massive 1,620 litres with the rear seats down.

But it's not just empty space you get. The equipment list is class-leading: Standard are xenon headlamps with washers, adaptive front lights, cornering fog lights, cruise control and a touch-screen entertainment system with navigation and hard drive.

All in all, the Octavia VRS offers a lot for its price, enough to make the competition take note. It has the quality, performance and looks — not to mention tons of extra stuff — to make it a rocking good deal.

Skoda Octavia VRS Combi

Ups

- Go-faster good looks
- Great drivetrain
- Quality cabin, tons of space
- Generous equipment list

Downs

- Handling and steering could be better
- Jittery ride

Engine: 1,984cc, 16V turbocharged in-line 4

Power: 200bhp at 6,000rpm

Torque: 280Nm at 1,700-5,000rpm

Gearbox: 6-speed semi-automatic

Performance: 240kmh, 0-100kmh 7.2 seconds

Price: \$115,800 with COE



BMW F 800 R naked street bike.

BMW reveals a naked surprise

LAST week, TODAY covered the launch of two new bikes from BMW — the K 1300 S and R models, which are sport-touring and naked performance bikes (bikes without fairings), respectively.

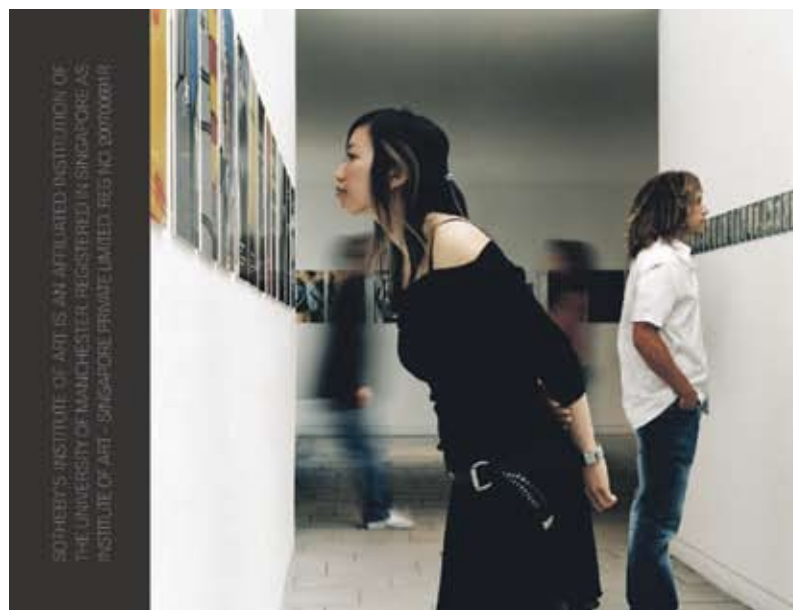
However, at the launch event, dealer Performance Motors sprung a surprise. The main attraction of the night turned out to be the unforeseen unveiling of the new F 800 R naked street bike.

The F 800 R uses a parallel twin engine with 87bhp, much less than its K series siblings who have more than 170bhp each. But being less expensive, it is likely to be a more popular seller. Being the main tool of European stunt-biker extraordinaire Chris Pfeiffer doesn't hurt its popularity either.

While it uses the same engines as other F series bikes — such as the F 800 GS — it has significant upgrades in all areas, including the electronic systems and chassis components.

The F 800 R is priced at \$25,800. The K 1300 S and R go for \$43,800 and \$41,800, respectively. Prices quoted exclude COE, insurance, road tax, etc.

DERRYN WONG



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