

# Road test: 2014 Volkswagen Touareg TDI Highline



• Diesel-powered, all-wheel-drive, and boasting a luxurious cabin: There's a lot to like about the 2014 Volkswagen Touareg TDI Highline.

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## Plush interior sets this fuel-frugal, all-wheel-drive SUV apart from its peers



By **Derek McNaughton**

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Canadians are a frugal lot. Not content to buy an SUV that just gets 500 kilometres to a full tank of fuel, buyers in this country are increasingly looking to diesel-powered SUVs, which in many cases will return more than 1,000 kilometres to a tank.

Mercedes, for example, says 80% of its customers who buy an SUV are now opting for diesel. Audi, Porsche, GM and Chrysler are expanding their diesel offerings, and

[Volkswagen](#), long the torchbearer for diesel, continues to enjoy a “take rate” on its Touareg TDI at 66%. That number may have remained constant through the years, but sales of the Touareg are at an all-time high.

And so they should be.

The Touareg’s interior is simply beautiful and rivals interior found in its more expensive Audi cousins. The instrumentation is gorgeous, the controls simply laid out and uncluttered, and the touch screen controls complemented by proper knobs for basic functions like stereo volume or temperature.

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Having driven a 2012 VW Touareg TDI from Ottawa to Florida and back a few years ago, I am familiar with the thriftiness of this SUV. On that long trip, I averaged 8.1 L/100 km at an average speed of 112 km/h. On my recent drive of the 2014 Touareg TDI Highline, which gets a 15-horsepower increase to 240, I recorded a long-term average (that’s city and highway driving) of 8.6 L/100 km. The range on a full, 100-litre tank showed 1,140 kilometres-to-empty on my last fill. That, if you pardon my enthusiasm, is spectacular for a 2,227-kilogram object. If only more SUVs were this thrifty.

The Touareg’s 3.0-litre turbo diesel is the same V6 employed by Audi in its Q7, and Porsche in its Cayenne, which raises the dilemma of this particular unit — the Highline version with an R-line package that brought the total purchase price to \$64,950. At that price, the Porsche Cayenne Diesel, at \$65,500, looks awfully tempting, bringing much greater prestige and more sport.

But if the idea of a Porsche SUV just doesn’t jive with the modest image that many of us Canadians prefer, the Volkswagen delivers a driving experience and level of luxury that will satisfy even the most demanding of drivers, even those of us who love Porsches.

For \$3,475, the R-Line package brings desirable features, including a power tailgate, 20-inch alloy wheels, alloy pedals, chromed oval tailpipes, R-Line rear spoiler, R-Line sport steering wheel with paddle shifters, R-Line aluminum door sills and an R-Line exterior design package with different front and rear bumpers and side skirts.

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The Touareg interior, for starters, seems almost out of place for a brand that prides itself on providing basic transportation for so many, because, simply put, it’s beautiful — certainly better than the aging Audi Q7’s interior. The instrumentation is gorgeous, the controls simply

laid out and uncluttered, the touch screen controls complemented by proper knobs for basic functions like stereo volume or temperature. The eight-inch touch screen with navigation and a backup camera is a snap to operate and easy to see. And the heated steering wheel, panoramic sunroof and heated, Vienna leather power seats work to create a cabin that's as good or better than BMW's X5, the Mercedes ML or the Acura MDX.

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The R-Line gets rid of the walnut, too, replacing the trim with aluminum and piano-black plastic. The R-Line package, for \$3,475, brings other desirable features, including a power tailgate (but deletes opening by foot), 20-inch alloy wheels, alloy pedals, chromed oval tailpipes, R-Line rear spoiler, R-Line sport steering wheel with paddle shifters, R-Line aluminum door sills and an R-Line exterior design package with different front and rear bumpers and side skirts.

Why it doesn't get snazzy LED brake and turn signal lamps to complement the front LEDs and HID headlamps is an unfortunate shortcoming. But, wisely, the Touareg remains a five-seat SUV, allowing for 32 cubic feet of cargo behind the seats.

Fuel-economy in the diesel TDI Touareg is impressive. On a long-term test, we averaged 8.6 L/100 km (in a mix of city and highway driving). The range on a full, 100-litre tank showed 1,140 kilometres-to-empty on our last fill.

Derek McNaughton, Driving

More importantly, the R-Line also brings a sport suspension that can feel noticeably abrupt over broken pavement. While the R-Line package is excellent value, the stiffer suspension is like buying brogues when runners will do just fine. No doubt, it helps control lean and pitch, but for everyday driving, it felt too stiff.

And like brogues that were traditionally considered outdoor footwear, the Touareg should be plenty capable in deep snow or mud, even on rocky terrain. VW's 4Motion permanent all-wheel-drive system is standard. It's controlled by a single button aft of the primary gear selector. 4Motion features a lockable Torsen centre-differential tasked, under normal situations, with distributing the drive power between the front and rear axles depending on traction, so it's constantly adjusting where the torque needs to go, normally sending 60 per cent to the back wheels, 40 to the front. A towing receiver is standard on the Highline, giving it the ability to tow a maximum 7,700 pounds.

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With 406 lb.-ft. of torque available, it's a good thing most of the torque goes to the back wheels because the Touareg jumps to attention at a very early 1,750 rpm and feels impressively quick (also ideal for towing). The Touareg should shave the 100 km/h mark

very close to the Cayenne diesel's time of 7.6 seconds. The eight-speed automatic, which does provide a sport mode for manual shifting, also adjusts to individual driving patterns. It feels especially good through the gears. The brake pedal feels overly firm, but can stop this SUV in fewer than 42 metres from 100 km/h.

So, as impressive as the 2014 Touareg TDI might be in performance, the overriding attraction of this SUV is the combination of elegant interior, 4WD capability and unbelievable fuel economy. Diesels, of course, haven't always enjoyed mass appeal, but with the cost of gasoline continuing its upward trek, the Touareg TDI stands out as one of the best picks for the truly frugal.

The Volkswagen Touareg seats five people, which means there's ample space in the back for cargo.

Derek McNaughton, Driving

### **The Specs**

Type of vehicle All-wheel-drive mid-sized SUV

Engine 3.0L V6 turbodiesel

Power 240 hp @ 3,500 rpm, 406 lb.-ft. of torque @ 1,750 rpm

Transmission Eight-speed manual

Brakes Four-wheel disc with ABS

Tires P275/45R20

Price (base/as tested) \$53,975/\$64,950

Destination charge \$1,610

Transport Canada fuel economy (L/100 km) 10.8 city, 6.7 highway

Standard features Bi-Xenon adaptive HID headlights with LED DRLs, rearview camera, rain-sensing wipers with heated washer nozzles, dual-zone automatic climate control, power-adjustable steering wheel with memory, 12-way power front seats, leather seating surfaces, heated steering wheel, heated front seats, keyless access with start/stop button, 8-inch touch screen with single CD/DVD player, MP3 playback, AM/FM radio, SD card input, 60 GB hard drive and satellite navigation with 3D landmarks, satellite radio, Bluetooth, power panoramic sunroof, Park Distance Control, 4MOTION all-wheel drive system, 60/40-split folding/sliding rear seats with ski pass-through.

Options R-Line Package: 20-inch Mallory alloy wheels with all-season tires, alloy pedals, aluminum interior trim, chromed oval tailpipes, R-Line rear spoiler, R-Line sport steering wheel with paddle shifters, R-Line aluminum door sills, R-Line exterior design package (front and rear bumpers and side skirts), R-Line exterior badging, Sport suspension.