

## 2012 Volkswagen Golf R

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A racing version of the past

By Lou Ann Hammond



The most powerful Golf ever offered deserves some of the most beautiful scenes the French Alps has to offer.

By all weather accounts it was supposed to be raining, or snowing, the day we started our journey from Geneva through the French Alps down to the banks of Lac d'Annecy, heralded as the purest lake in Europe because of the environmental regulations.

The Abbey, l'Abbaye de Talloires, is nestled in a small cove on the South side of the Lake. At one time the church owned the Abbey, but now such celebrities as Jean Reno and Bruce Willis have a stake in the property. You walk up the steps through the 450 year old trees and you are walking up the same steps that Paul Cezanne walked and drew.

### the banks of Lac d'Annecy, France

on an incline. It's a good test for any car.

This is the first time Volkswagen has offered a 2.0 turbo charged all-wheel drive in a Golf for the U.S. market. The fourth generation Haldex, or 4motion, makes this the most technological advanced system that VW has offered in the Golf. The previous generation Haldex took about six seconds to engage the rear, this generation is practically instantaneous.

Volkswagen is bringing their A game to the Golf R. The tweaked up, teched out Golf R has a better sound and more horsepower than the GTI. The near-European suspension rivals the competitors that are already in the United States. The 18-inch Talladega alloy wheels zip through the round-about and is surefooted on the straight-aways.

The competitors are the BMW 135i, the Subaru WRX STI and the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo. The biggest disadvantage for the Golf R is that it will only be offered in manual, while Subaru and Mitsubishi offer both automatic and stick in the U.S. market.

We drove the DSG automatic version of the Golf R turbo. I complained about lag to my colleague, but wasn't sure if it was DSG lag or turbo lag. The lag happened on take-off, not in corners. If it's DSG lag that's okay, since the Golf R is coming to America in manual turbo version only.



VW says they had to make a decision between automatic and manual for the U.S. market, even though they have both transmissions in Europe. They worked with focus groups and those groups said by a large margin that they would buy a manual over automatic. The actual word buy was used, not liked. Those are the most important words that can be said, that they would buy.

### the past and the future

Volkswagen has not made a profit in the United States in the last nine years. Knowing, for sure, what their buying customer wants has become the highest priority. Especially if you are bringing over a specialty item like the Golf R.

The U.S. market will get the lower horsepower variant of the 2.0 TSI 4motion engine. The U.S. is considered a "hot country", so the technicians tune the European version to 270 horsepower, but the same engine will get somewhere between 256-260 horsepower in the U.S. with a 243 lb.-ft@2,400-5,200 of torque.

Everything else is the same. Both cars in each country have the same connecting rods, the same forged crank, it's just a tuning difference. This generation 2012 VW Golf R will be the fastest Golf in the U.S., and possibly faster than the Volkswagen CC VR6.

There are subtle external differences in the European version versus the American version. Notably, there won't be black inlay in the headlamps and no LED in the taillights. If you want everyone to know you've got the R then buy the rising blue color that is specially made for the R version.

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Every weekend I call my eighty-nine year old mother-in-law and tell her about my week. When I got back from Switzerland I called her and we were talking about the auto show. I said something about Volkswagen and then explained to her that Volkswagen AG was comprised of Volkswagen cars, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, SEAT, Audi, Skoda, Lamborghini, Bentley, Porsche and Bugatti. She laughed and said that when she heard of Volkswagen she always thought of the VW bus from the '70s.



From Geneva to France

When I mentioned that I had driven a Volkswagen from Geneva to France she reminisced that she and her husband, Cal, had flown into Frankfurt in the mid-eighties and rented a Volkswagen. I asked her which Volkswagen she had driven and she couldn't remember. Was it a diesel? I don't think so, she said, definitely not, she said after a minute. I would remember paying for diesel.

Even though this event took place some twenty-five years ago I believed Jeanne when she said she would remember if it were diesel. Not only is her memory still that good at eighty-nine years old, but an American buying anything but gasoline for a car would be memorable.

I threw a couple names out for her, Golf, Passat, Jetta. "Oh, definitely the Golf. I've never heard of the Passant, or whatever you said. No, it was the Golf. I remember now. Daddy rented the car and the first car he passed on the Autobahn was a Mercedes-Benz. He went faster in that car then he had ever gone in a car before."

She was on a memory trip, "We stopped and picked up Paul (the youngest of their five Sons) and drove on the Autobahn to Normandy, France. Paul sat in the back and I remember that he was really comfortable in the back." Paul is 6'4" so that memory would stand out to my Mother-in-law as well.

I got off the phone and looked it up and, sure enough, my Mother-in-law was right. The Golf has been around since 1974. It has seen many iterations, but it has stood the test of time.

The Golf R will start production in November and make it to America as a 2012 model. All Golf Rs will come standard with climatronic automatic air conditioning.

There will be a four-door option. The second trim level will include sunroof, navigation, smartkey, dynaudio.

Rev your engines. Open your wallet. The car will start around \$32,990. There will only be 5,000 made a year for the U.S. market. Expect some of those to be exported back to Europe where the price of a manual turbo is about \$48,000.

Mon Dieu!



a tree in front of l'Abbaye de Talloires

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