

Volkswagen Racing Caddy Van TDI

This is surely the world's most unusual racing car! The Caddy TDI is not just a novelty though. With finishes as high as 2nd place in the Volkswagen Racing Cup, beating Golf GTIs, R32s and Beetle RSIs along the way, this is a serious racer as well as being the ultimate crowd-pleaser.



The story of Caddy Van racing started in 2002. Peter Wyhinny, then the Director of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles UK, drove our guest car in the Polo Rally Challenge as his first experience of motorsport. He came back in 3rd place and was hooked!

The first generation Caddy was then very similar mechanically to the Polo, and the discussion started over whether a diesel-powered rally-prepared Caddy would work.



The ideas developed over the next few weeks, with the plan moving to targeting circuit racing with the new project. Initially the plan was to build a low-spec vehicle for track days and to act as course car for the Volkswagen Racing Cup.

But soon everyone involved realised that we had the opportunity to launch the world's first racing van, and to get a lot of coverage for Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles in the process.

So at the final race of 2002, at Thruxton circuit, the Caddy TDI was unveiled. The interest (and disbelief) from other competitors, officials and spectators was amazing. The Caddy finished the race, albeit not far from last place, and we went home with a long list of developments. But the idea of van racing had taken hold!



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The treatment by officials of the Caddy Van Racer illustrated well how the motorsport authorities didn't know what to make of it. The Motor Sport Association, governing all of UK motorsport found a ruling in their 'blue book' of rules that specifically outlawed Commercial Vehicles from racing except with their permission. As we believed this Thruxton race to be a one-off outing, we secured grudging approval from the MSA to compete. When the plans to race it in the following year developed, their permission was not given. So, for a short time, it seemed as if the project would have to end right there, until somebody in our office noticed a Caddy Combi delivering parts. After a quick check, we found that the Combi with rear windows and rear seats was classified as a car and not a van. Hence from 2003 onwards, spectators noticed that rear windows had been cut into the body, and it was technically no longer a van!



Development continued on the original Caddy racer over the following 2 years, with power from the 1.9 TDI engine reaching 220bhp. But whilst the front suspension, brakes and steering were all you would expect of a competitive saloon-car racer, the rear suspension design was always the limiting factor to the van's handling characteristics.

Nevertheless, the original Caddy (or Caddy Classic as it became affectionately known) repeatedly got top 10 results, with a best placing of sixth.

So this is what we knew we had to beat when the chance came to start work on the Caddy Mk2.....



As soon as the new Caddy was released one was despatched straight to RacingLine's Volkswagen Racing engineers. As expected, we found that the front end was basically the same as the all-new Golf Mk5 that we had just started development on. This would make the job of sourcing and fitting a competitive power unit very much easier. However, the rear suspension had the same beam and leaf spring arrangement as the first Caddy, and weight had increased considerably.

A 2.0 TDI engine was sourced to replace the standard 1.9 TDI, and the job of preparing the bodyshell began. A full rollcage was designed and fitted, and a number of weight-saving measures were taken while the shell was bare. Mountings for the 5-link rear suspension were also fabricated.

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The new Caddy is now 3 years into it's racing life, and has had some very memorable moments. Jason Plato, ex British Touring Car Champion raced the van at a wet Brands Hatch in its debut year.



In early 2008, EVO Magazine raced the Caddy against our Jetta TSI. In the wet conditions that always suit the Caddy, journalist Roger Green took 3rd place finishes in both of the races. A month later at Rockingham circuit Peter Wyhinny came an amazing second place in the race, trailing the winning Golf GTI by only 0.44 second at the end of the race and setting a new lap record in the process.

This is testament to the ongoing development of the Caddy; engine, chassis and reliability.

The engine, using a Volkswagen Racing turbo-charger and mapping has produced 292bhp very reliably - although we race at 'just' 260bhp. But the most amazing fact is that the engine and gear-box internals are completely standard. So despite running at almost twice the output that it was designed for, and with the extreme demands of racing, the standard Volkswagen components are immensely strong.



We believe that at 292bhp the Caddy engine is now the world's most powerful diesel engine per litre (running on normal pump diesel). It produces comfortably more power/litre even than the all-conquering Audi diesel at Le Mans.

Development will continue on the Caddy, and surely an historic race win is not far away!




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