



Amarok in action

The Volkswagen Amarok is here. Well, almost. CHARLEEN CLARKE was one of the first South African journalists to drive it on South African roads

The official launch of the Amarok, which takes place next month, must be the worst-kept secret around. Hell, we were writing about it two years ago. That was when Volkswagen first announced that it would launch the bakkie.

It was at the IAA Commercial Vehicle show, and the vehicle had pride of place on the company's massive stand. We were also at the world launch that took place the night before the show opened – Bryan Ferry rocked us with his Roxy Music, as journalists from across the globe were treated to the first sighting of this enormous, important, as yet unnamed product within the Volkswagen range.

In 2009, the name was leaked to the media, and then subsequently formally announced. The bakkie would be Amarok, named after a wolf.

Early in 2010, it was time for journalists to drive the first production



The Amarok was impressive, both on and off the road.

Planned Amarok model range and market introduction dates					
Model Description	Power (kW)	Torque (Nm)	Emissions Concept	CO ₂ Emissions (g/km)	Launch date
Single Cab					
2.0 TSI 4x2 Basic	118	300	EU4	236	April 2011
2.0 TSI 4x2 Trendline	118	300	EU4	236	April 2011
2.0 TDI 4x2 Basic	90	350	EU3	199	April 2011
2.0 TDI 4x2 Trendline	90	350	EU3	199	April 2011
2.0 TDI 4x4 Basic	90	350	EU3	207	April 2011
2.0 TDI 4x4 Trendline	90	350	EU3	207	April 2011
2.0 BiTDI 4x2 Trendline	120	400	EU3	204	April 2011
2.0 BiTDI 4x4 Trendline	120	400	EU3	209	April 2011
Double Cab					
2.0 TSI 4x2 Trendline	118	300	EU4	236	April 2011
2.0 TDI 4x2 Trendline	90	350	EU3	199	Dec 2010
2.0 TDI 4x4 Trendline	90	350	EU3	207	Dec 2010
2.0 BiTDI 4x2 Highline	120	400	EU3	204	Oct 2010
2.0 BiTDI 4x4 Highline	120	400	EU3	209	Oct 2010

units – over in Argentina where the bakkie is lovingly pieced together. Bearing in mind the significance of this new model, we decided to make it our cover star, and – in May 2010 – the Amarok graced our cover. At the time, we asked the question: could this be a Hilux-beater?

This question was once again foremost in mind when we headed down to Port Elizabeth to drive the first South African production units. It's a logical question – the Hilux has dominated the bakkie market for so long. In fact, it's dominated the vehicle market – it was the single most popular vehicle in South Africa last year. I'm talking the entire market here – it even knocked the socks off entry-level cars which, in our cash-strapped economy, tend to rule the sales statistics roost.

But it's also a tall ask; the Hilux may be a little long in the tooth but it's an outstanding vehicle. Will the Amarok snap at its heels or remove huge dollops of its market share?

Well, let's start with the first thing that one notices when reviewing any new vehicle: the exterior styling. The Amarok is definitely better than the Hilux in this regard. With its Volkswagen nose and softer lines, it's way prettier. The interior styling of the Amarok is better too; it looks just like the interior of any Volkswagen car.

The seats are comfortable and they provide good support, while the quality of materials used is top-notch. There are some good practical features in the vehicle too; such as the power socket right on top of the console, where you can plug in your trusty GPS. That's



Volkswagen claims that the Amarok is tough; it's good looking too.

a really nice feature; I hate those untidy wires that hang from the windscreen down to the cigarette lighter.

But it's far from flawless. The safety belt attachment point is untidy and rudimentary, there isn't nearly enough storage space for your bits and pieces and there is a downright silly cup holder contraption on the floor just in front of the rear seats. It looks as though it's an afterthought, it appears flimsy and it

doesn't look as though it will last very long. It's a surprising feature in a Volkswagen.

What isn't surprising is the ride comfort. If I had to travel from Johannesburg to Cape Town in a double cab, I would want it to be in an Amarok; it's extremely comfortable – up front and in the back. The ride is a little softer than other bakkies, but handling and road holding is never compromised. It soaks up any undulations in the road and you don't have that bone jolting, filler dislodging drive that you



There is no getting away from the distinctive Volkswagen styling up front.

Double Cab Product Comparison				
Model	Amarok Double Cab 2.0 BiTDi Highline 4x4 six-speed manual	Hilux Double Cab 3.0 D-4D 4x4 Raider five-speed manual	Isuzu Double Cab 300 D-TEQ 4x4 LX five-speed manual	Nissan Double Cab Navara 2.5 dCi LE 4x4 six-speed manual
Retail Price (incl. VAT)	TBA	R 393 700	R 394 300	R 404 150
Cylinders	4	4	4	4
Power (kW @ rpm)	120 @ 4000	120 @ 3400	120 @ 3600	140 @ 4000
Torque (Nm @ rpm)	400 @ 1500-2000	343 @ 1400-3200	360 @ 1800-2800	450 @ 2000
Fuel Consumption (litres/100km)	7.9	10.6	11.2	10.6
CO ₂ (g/km)	208	278	293	224
Seats (including driver)	5	5	5	5
Wheels				
Rims	17" Alloy	7JJ x 16 Alloy	7J x 16 Alloy	17" Alloy
Tyres	245/65 R17	265/70 R16	245/70 R16	255/65 R17
Safety & Security				
Braking Systems	ABS, ESP	ABS	ABS	ABS
Airbags	D+P; Head-Thorax	D+P; Side; Curtain	D+P	D+P; Side; Curtain
Central locking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anti-theft	Alarm & Immobiliser	Alarm & Immobiliser	Alarm & Immobiliser	Alarm & Immobiliser
Comfort				
Radio/CD	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Air-conditioning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Power Steering	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dimensions & weights				
Length (mm)	5254	5255	5030	5296
Wheelbase (mm)	3095	3085	3050	3200
Width (mm)	1954	1835	1800	1850
Height (mm)	1834	1850	1750	1907
GVM (kg)	2820	2760	2900	2805
Towing Capacity (kg)	2800	1500	1100	3000
Payload (kg)	862 (1047 optional)	870	900	845
Load Box Length (mm)	1555	1520	1380	1511
Load Box Width (mm)	1620	1515	1460	1560
Load Box Height (mm)	508	450	480	457
Warranties and Service				
Service Plan (years/km)	5/90 000	5/90 000	5/90 000	3/90 000
Service Intervals (km)	15 000	10 000	15 000	15 000
Warranty (years/km)	3/120 000	3/100 000	3/100 000	3/100 000
Volume 2010 April YTD	n/a	1277	251	69

Source: Volkswagen South Africa

get in virtually all other bakkies.

Yet another aspect of the Amarok that didn't fail to surprise me is the safety; Volkswagen has long enjoyed a reputation for building über safe vehicles. The Amarok does a good job in this regard. ESP is standard on the Highline (it's optional on other models) and off-road ABS is standard across the range. We saw a demonstration of this technology; it really does work well. Hill Start and Hill Descent Assist are included with ESP.

But, of course, the most controversial

aspect of the new Amarok is the engine. It's powered by a 2.0-litre motor (all the technical specs appear on the graph) and some customers are nervous that it may be too pap. Is this a justifiable concern? I honestly cannot comment. In Port Elizabeth, we had four adults in the vehicle and it never felt as though it was lacking in the power stakes. But, in fairness, the vehicle wasn't loaded. Hopefully – when the official launch takes place next month – we will have an opportunity to verify its capabilities while operating under a full load. The load bay

is the widest and deepest in its class; it's also the longest amongst double cabs, so we know that the vehicle is more than capable of taking a huge load.

We also don't know pricing yet. At this stage, we're expecting the Amarok to be slightly more expensive than the equivalent Hilux models – expect to pay a premium of about R5 000 or so. All will be revealed at next month's official launch and, of course, we will be there to bring **FOCUS** readers all the news. ■