



ARONA SET TO BOOST SEAT FLEET GROWTH

Range will cover 80% of market sectors after small SUV is launched

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‘WE ARE MORE FORMIDABLE AS A FLEET PLAYER NOW’

Growth of product range means SEAT will soon cover bigger percentage (80%) of market sectors and signs point to figure increasing. *Andrew Ryan* reports

SEAT has been one of the UK fleet sector's biggest success stories in recent times. It has enjoyed four consecutive years of growth in this marketplace, with registrations for the first seven months of the year 37% up on the same period in 2016.

Within that increase, SEAT's true fleet registrations have grown 62%, with the Ateca SUV's popularity and influence on the product range key to that.

"We can't underplay the effect Ateca has had in growing the awareness and desirability of the brand," says Peter McDonald, head of fleet and business sales at SEAT UK.

"It is a fantastic car which has won many industry awards, and we've seen unprecedented demand for it.

"At the moment, demand for the SUV in retail and true fleet is so strong that it can take all the allocation available to us, but the positive news is this has meant the Ateca's residual values (RVs) are incredibly strong.

"Another great thing about this demand is that it hasn't come at any cost to us by taking registrations from our other models.

"We also had record order take on Ibiza and Leon, so we've seen more awareness and desirability for the overall SEAT range."

Before the Ateca's launch last year, SEAT's range covered 50% of market sectors, but by the end of the year – after small SUV Arona is launched – this will increase to 80%. This will rise even further by the end of next year after the brand launches its flagship large SUV.

The Arona will be the first SEAT to enter the small SUV segment, and McDonald says this will further help the manufacturer grow in the fleet sector.

"Small SUV is the fastest growing part of the true fleet marketplace," he adds. "It's not mature yet and while some of our competitors have got an equivalent model it is not all

of them. So this is a really important car for us to broaden our range and drive desirability. It is something customers are genuinely interested in.

"We've got really high hopes for Arona. We've been able to show by our growth that as we've brought more product into our range, it's made us more formidable as a fleet player, it's grown our capability in the marketplace and we think Arona will only help us sell more of our products."

McDonald says the manufacturer has taken a considered view to ensure the growth is sustainable and will not adversely affect RVs.

"The real development is that we've reduced our rental volume so we protect our residual values by consciously reducing our short cycle business," he says.

"With Ateca we haven't done any rental on the car since we launched it and we don't have plans to."

SEAT aims to cut its rental registrations by a third. But it has seen significant growth in Motability, with registrations in this channel growing 277%, to 2,500 units in the first six months of 2017 compared to the same period last year.

"This is part of our RV management," says McDonald. "We've intentionally switched some volume

from rental into Motability because Motability represents a really good residual value management proposition.

"The car is kept by the customer for three years and it is serviced by the dealer network.

"For a manufacturer like ourselves, Motability is a very good organisation to support as it allows its customers to be more mobile and it leads to fewer cars coming back into the market than short cycle business.

"Our dealers are really behind it and aware of how to approach the Motability market. We have increased our advertising and marketing spend in the marketplace as well."

SEAT's dealer network is also key to another area the manufacturer is making a concerted effort in – making the brand more accessible and easier to deal with for fleet customers.

The manufacturer has two dealer programmes aimed at improving its service and support to fleets.

Twenty-five dealers are currently involved in the local business development programme, launched in 2014. This sees them employ experts in understanding taxation and small fleet business requirements.

This was supplemented earlier this year by Fleet Excellence, which is designed to help dealers support and meet the requirements of larger fleets. Sixteen dealers are currently on the programme.

"This is an investment programme that

"We are targeting the top 10 (of biggest brands) next year – 10th is probably the right place to be"

Peter McDonald, SEAT

supports the dealers financially on the basis they can meet the qualifying criteria around customer satisfaction, invoice management, forecasting and accuracy – the things big fleets care a lot about – and is concentrated on our large dealerships that manage larger fleets," says McDonald. "That's working really well."

SEAT has also recently expanded its successful four-day test drive initiative (see penultimate spread), which improves the accessibility of demonstrator vehicles for businesses, and included more models, while it will also launch a revamped fleet website with a new wholelife cost calculator in Q4.

Another innovation introduced was the use of virtual reality to give a virtual hand-over to 42 new Leon owners at Red Bull.

Using a VR Gear headset and Samsung smartphone, the drivers were given personalised video tours of their new cars ahead of receiving their vehicles so they could familiarise themselves with them.

"All of their staff were able to understand the controls and how the car works in a really good way, a motivational way, and everyone walked away fully understanding how their car works," says McDonald.

"We want to do more things like that which make life easy for our customers."

The Arona will also play a key part in the manufacturer's aim of making the lives of fleet operators and company car drivers more straightforward – it will feature a simplified trim range to minimise any confusion caused by the new worldwide harmonised light vehicles procedure (WLTP) regulations (see panel below).

These initiatives, together with the improved range of cars, will help SEAT continue to grow in the fleet sector, says McDonald.

"At the moment we are the 13th biggest brand in true fleet, up from 19th last year, and in the middle of most months we are in the top 10," he adds.

"Our order take is actually ahead of our registrations. We've only just launched new Ibiza, and we get Arona this winter, so we have belief that our sales results will only improve: we are targeting the top 10 next year – 10th is probably the right place to be."

KEEPING ARONA SPECS SIMPLE TO AVOID EXTRA ADMIN WHEN WLTP TEST KICKS IN

SEAT's desire to keep things simple for fleets has influenced the way it approached setting the trim levels for the Arona.

The range has six fixed trims which have all the equipment added to them the "majority of customers expect", so all the driver has to do is specify equipment grade, engine and colour.

Under the forthcoming worldwide harmonised light vehicle test procedure (WLTP), options added to a car will affect its official fuel efficiency and CO₂ ratings.

"This could mean end-user customers and leasing customers managing a huge amount more complexity than they do today," says head of fleet and business sales Peter McDonald.

"Our way of managing that is by creating the right vehicles for the marketplace, already with the right specification on them rather than having to choose options and then go through the complexity of finding out what the CO₂ implications are.

"Arona is the first time we've done that and we believe it's industry-leading. We will take a lot of learning from that and potentially apply it to other models in our range."

FR Sport is one of the six trim levels on the Arona



Meet the Arona

The SEAT Arona is the Spanish brand's third new car launched in 2017, after the upgraded Leon and the new Ibiza. The small SUV joins the range as the little brother to the highly-acclaimed Ateca, while the manufacturer's SUV family will be completed with the launch of a large SUV next year (more overleaf). Arona is the first SEAT model in the compact crossover segment, which has increased four-fold since 2015. It is also the fastest-growing segment in the UK true fleet market, with around 40,000 registrations last year.

DESIGN

The Arona shares many styling cues with its striking big brother, Ateca. Its robust front follows the same structure as the larger model, with a three-dimensional look that's more pronounced without being aggressive.

"We wanted to give the Arona the distinct feel of a crossover, a sturdy car for everyday life, for the urban jungle," says Alejandro Mesonero, design director at SEAT.

"That's why it features such strong protection in the bumpers, the wheel arches and the dark coloured rubber side skirts, as well as the roof rack and the aluminium look-like protection at the bottom of the bumpers."

In addition to its rack, the roof evokes the aesthetics of all-terrain vehicles.

Based on the Volkswagen Group's MQB A0 platform, with a length of 4,138mm, the Arona is 79mm longer than Ibiza and is 99mm taller.

As a result, Arona offers not only more ground clearance for greater off-road capability, but also more front and rear headroom, as well as a larger boot with a 400-litre capacity.

The driving position is also higher which gives an impressive view of the road ahead as well as making it easier to get in and out of the car.



The entry level Arona SE

POWERTRAINS

All engines in the Arona range have direct injection, a turbo, and feature an automatic stop/start system.

There are three petrol engines. The first is the three-cylinder, 95PS 1.0 TSI linked to a five-speed manual gearbox. Next is the same engine but with a 115PS output, which comes with a six-speed manual or the dual-clutch seven-speed DSG transmission. The third is the new four-cylinder, 150PS TSI with active cylinder deactivation technology connected to a six-speed gearbox.

As for diesel options, the efficient and reliable 1.6 TDI will be available with 95PS and 115PS. The 95PS version can be paired with a five-speed manual transmission or seven-speed DSG, and the 115PS with a six-speed gearbox.

TECHNOLOGY

Arona features many safety and infotainment technologies usually found only in cars from the class above. Available equipment includes Front Assist, Adaptive Cruise Control, Hill Hold control, Tiredness Recognition System, Auto lights and wipers, Multi-Collisions Braking, keyless entry and start system, high-quality rear camera, an eight-inch black panel touchscreen and Connectivity Hub with wireless phone charger and GSM signal amplifier.

The Arona also offers an optional Rear Traffic Alert, Blind Spot Detection and Park Assistance System, which works for both parallel and angled parking.

Front Assist, which includes autonomous emergency braking is standard throughout the range, while every model in the line-up above the entry-level SE will have the eight-inch multimedia screen.

"We wanted to give the Arona the distinct feel of a crossover, a sturdy car for everyday life"

Alejandro Mesonero, SEAT

TRIM LEVELS/EQUIPMENT

The Arona is available in six trim levels. The range begins with the SE trim with a P11D of £16,340 which comes equipped with bi-colour roof, 17-inch alloy wheels, and LED daytime running lights as standard.

For an additional £990, the next model up is the SE Technology which includes an enhanced media system with eight-inch touchscreen, satellite navigation, a wireless charger and rear parking sensors.

The range then branches into two arms: comfort and sport.

Sport begins with FR with a P11D of £19,680 and comes equipped with everything in the SE Technology as well as sporty exterior styling, upgraded upholstery and interior trim.

Above that, FR Sport offers stand-out style, adding 18-inch machined alloy wheels, alcantara upholstery and dynamic chassis control with a P11D of £20,450.

Within the comfort arm, the XCELLENCE is the next trim level. From £20,825 P11D, this model offers adaptive cruise control, full LED headlights, blind spot detection and rear traffic alert on top of the equipment in the SE Technology. The range-topping XCELLENCE Lux trim offers the ultimate in comfort and luxury with alcantara upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels, park assist and rear view camera for a P11D of £21,880.



XCELLENCE Lux interior has all instruments angled towards the driver

INTERIOR

The interior's horizontal proportions emphasise and enhance the car's size, giving an even greater feel of roominess and space inside, as well as increased sophistication.

The High Console Concept also gives the console more prominence, which affects the safety and ergonomics since every element is positioned so that the driver barely has to look away from the road while driving.

All instruments are angled toward the driver, while all controls are within reach to allow for easy adjustments and increased safety.

The fabrics, shades and colours are exclusive to Arona.

FUNCTIONAL TO HIGH-END: TRIM LEVELS FOR EVERY DRIVER

Model	CO ₂ (g/km)	VED band	MPG	Recommended basic	Recommended OTR	P11D value	BIK 2017/18
Arona SE 1.0 TSI 95PS	111	G	57.6	£13,616.67	£16,555	£16,340	21%
Arona SE 1.0 TSI DSG-auto 115PS	113	G	56.5	£14,783.33	£17,955	£17,740	21%
Arona SE Technology 1.0 TSI 95PS	111	G	57.6	£14,441.67	£17,545	£17,330	21%
Arona SE Technology 1.0 TSI DSG-auto 115PS	113	G	56.5	£15,608.33	£18,945	£18,730	21%
Arona FR 1.0 TSI 115PS	113	G	57.6	£16,400.00	£19,895	£19,680	21%
Arona FR 1.0 TSI DSG-auto 115PS	113	G	56.5	£17,300.00	£20,975	£20,760	21%
Arona FR Sport 1.0 TSI 115PS	114	G	56.5	£17,041.67	£20,665	£20,450	21%
Arona XCELLENCE 1.0 TSI 115PS	113	G	57.6	£17,354.17	£21,040	£20,825	21%
Arona XCELLENCE 1.0 TSI DSG-auto 115PS	113	G	56.5	£18,187.50	£22,040	£21,825	21%
Arona XCELLENCE Lux 1.0 TSI 115PS	114	G	56.5	£18,233.33	£22,095	£21,880	21%



“Arona has surpassed its bigger brother (Ateca) in terms of early interest”

Hywel Evans, SEAT

‘Fantastic’ traction as launch nears

New small SUV – Arona – will improve SEAT’s already strong fleet offering

The arrival of the Arona small SUV will strengthen SEAT’s already attractive proposition in the fleet sector, says the manufacturer.

“We are really excited by the Arona in terms of what it is going to do for our fleet offering,” says Hywel Evans, product manager for Arona and Ateca for SEAT UK.

“The market has seen a trend of company car drivers making the switch from saloon and hatch into SUV, and Ateca and Arona helps us move with that market shift.

“Previously as a brand, our fleet success has been driven and built around Leon – and Leon is a fantastic car and has done brilliant things for us – but the introduction of Ateca and now Arona means we’ve got that strength in depth.

“We can have conversations around offering a really strong portfolio to fleet customers who want a really deep, lasting relationship with one brand.”

Evans says the manufacturer has seen a high level of interest in the Arona ahead of its launch this winter.

“When you look at the styling of the car and some of the equipment that’s in it, there are some real synergies with Ateca, but what’s really exciting from my perspective is that it has surpassed its bigger brother in terms of early interest,” Evans says. “Its early traction has been fantastic.”

Arona will be available with a wide choice of petrol and diesel engines, as well as manual or DSG gearboxes, and Evans expects petrol uptake among fleet customers to be high. “Some of our big fleet customers are taking petrol models for the first time and we are expecting to see a swing towards petrol on Arona, possibly more so than we have on other models,” he adds.

FOUR-DAY TEST DRIVE SCHEME GETS MUCH POSITIVE FEEDBACK

More than 1,000 people have now taken part in SEAT UK Fleet’s four-day test drive scheme.

Under the initiative, which now covers Ibiza, Ateca, Leon and Alhambra models, the extended tests can be booked either online or by telephone.

“We’ve got a concentrated campaign to make life easy for user-chooser customers and small fleet customers to get a proper test drive experience,” says Peter McDonald, head of fleet and business sales at SEAT.

“You can simply go on to our website or make a phone call to book a test

drive. There is eligibility criteria, but it is really simple and straightforward, and the intention is to make our products as accessible to as many people as we can.

“We will provide a car and deliver it to the customer’s address and pick it up after four days: they can have a four-day unaccompanied test drive, which we’ve had some really good feedback on.

“Our cars are good, but to get confidence in a vehicle you need to spend time with it, in it with your family as well as a variety of different usages, and the test-drive scheme allows for that to occur.”

FLAGSHIP SUV TO LAUNCH IN 2018

SEAT’S SUV family will be complete by the end of next year when it launches its flagship model.

The large SUV, which will be available in five- and seven-seater versions, will be positioned one segment above the

successful Ateca.

“This will add another layer to our portfolio, so if you wanted a car bigger than Ateca we will have one in our range,” says Peter McDonald, head of fleet and business sales at SEAT UK.

SEVEN AWARDS AND COUNTING FOR ATECA

Since its launch last year, the SEAT Ateca has won numerous industry awards including:

■ Fleet News Best Mid-size SUV 2017

■ Honest John Car of the Year 2017

■ What Car? Best Small SUV 2017

■ Auto Express Crossover of the Year 2016

■ Autobest Best Buy Car of Europe 2017

■ Car Dealer Power Car of the Year 2017

■ UK Car of the Year Awards – Best Crossover