

20 years of the Phaeton: For the first time, Volkswagen shows the successor that was never built



PUBLISHED JUL 6, 2022
BY [VOLKSWAGEN](#)

Looking back on 20 years of the Phaeton – entry into the luxury [segment](#). The project launched by former Volkswagen Chair of the Board of Management Ferdinand Piëch at the end of the nineties was ambitious right from the start. He wanted to open up a new market segment for Volkswagen with a luxury saloon and at the same time take the whole brand to a new level.

5.06 metres long, 1.90 metres wide, 1.45 metres high – these dimensions alone meant a place for the Phaeton among its competitors in the luxury segment. However, in spite of its size, its visual appearance was understated. Its flowing design with slightly domed roof lines created a timeless and unostentatious appearance. The only stand-out features were the round tail light clusters at the rear installed under rectangular cover glass elements.

Elegance and highest quality materials. The calm contours of the body accommodated an interior that exuded stylish elegance. Chrome, wood veneer comprising up to 30 material layers and leather – this trio came together on the selector lever of the automatic gearbox, which seemed as solid and powerful as the thrust lever on a motor yacht. Wooden panels covered the vents, which opened electrically and silently when required depending on the setting of the automatic air conditioner and solar radiation. The ventilation operated almost without draughts even at the highest setting.

Lounge on wheels. The interior of the Phaeton was a mobile lounge, in which uncompromising quality and premium materials were combined with lovingly arranged technical details. The vehicle occupants were isolated from the outside world by doors that closed with a satisfying thud and thick glass panes, while the gaps between components were extremely narrow and strictly parallel. The optional Dynaudio sound system also satisfied the ears of discerning hi-fi enthusiasts.

The Phaeton really came into its own on long journeys. Its standard pneumatic suspension with adaptive damping allowed it to glide smoothly and softly on the motorway. Thanks to its extremely high torsional rigidity, the body did not rattle or creak at all. The bonnet, doors and boot lid were made of aluminium. A Phaeton version lengthened by 120 millimetres with opulent space at the rear of the passenger compartment was also available as a chauffeur model. Individual seats with massage and ventilation were optionally available – like in the standard version.

The name Phaeton also symbolised the exclusive status of the large saloon. This was not just a reference to Greek mythology, but also represented a link to classic models from Horch and Škoda with the same name.

Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Volkswagen, on Jul 6, 2022. For more information subscribe and [follow us](#).

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