

A world bestseller celebrates its 50th birthday – Volkswagen started production of the first Golf on 29 March 1974



PUBLISHED MAR 28, 2024
BY [VOLKSWAGEN](#)

Europe's number 1: the Golf is the most successful Volkswagen and the best-selling European car since the invention of the automobile

- 37 million units have been produced so far: every day over the last 50 years, more than 2,000 people worldwide have chosen a new Golf

- Guarantee of job security: 20 million of all Golfs built so far have been produced at the Wolfsburg plant. Over the years, eight generations of the Golf have been produced in eight countries around the world

- Securing the path to the future: major technology update for the anniversary featuring plug-in hybrid drives with an all-electric range of significantly more than 100 km and ChatGPT voice control with artificial intelligence

On 29 March exactly 50 years ago, Volkswagen started series production of the Golf in Wolfsburg. Nobody knew on that day in March that this compact car – the successor to the legendary Beetle – would become the most successful Volkswagen and best-selling European car of all time. It reflected the spirit of the times, gave its name to its own vehicle class, and has accompanied generations of people around the world. To date, more than 37 million units have followed 1974's first series-production Golf. Purely in mathematical terms, this means that over 2,000 people around the world have opted to buy a new Golf every single day over the last 50 years. Today, Volkswagen is celebrating the Golf's birthday – and also the start of this world bestseller's future thanks to a comprehensive technical and visual update.

Volkswagen – from the round Beetle to the angular Golf. The first new

Golf models could be seen in dealers' showrooms in July 1974. Where the Beetle and thus rear-mounted engines had previously dominated the scene for many decades, a new era now finally began: that of the front-mounted transverse engine. Volkswagen had already initiated this transition shortly before with the Scirocco and Passat. With the Golf, the highest-volume class now also used this new technology.

Volkswagen reinvents itself. As the successor to the legendary Beetle that had been produced more than 21.5 million times, the Golf developed by Giorgio Giugiaro and Volkswagen Design had to live up to high expectations in order to continue the success story of the most successful car of all time up to that point. And it did so in every way: customers were so impressed by the modern drive concept, variable interior and new design that the Golf had already hit the one million mark by October 1976.

The Golf principle. In 1974, Volkswagen wrote the following about the new vehicle with its large tailgate:

The Golf offers maximum space and safety. It is uncompromisingly geared towards practicality. The low beltline gives drivers a clear overview, and the sloping bonnet ensures that the road right in front of the vehicle is visible. The rear window extends well down, making reversing much easier.

And this all still applies up to the present day for every Golf ever built.

The Golf and the factory. From the very beginning, the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg and its employees also benefited from the successful start of the Golf I. To date, more than 20 million Golfs have been built in Wolfsburg alone. The 17 million Golfs built so far outside Wolfsburg have been produced in other German plants as well as in Belgium, Brazil, China, Malaysia, Mexico, Slovakia and South Africa. In this sense too, the Golf is a world car. However, its technologies have always been typical examples of progressive German engineering.

Golf I – A reflection of progress. Just like all following Golf generations, the first generation was also a reflection of the technical state-of-the-art and current automotive trends. And that was not just true of the ingenious use of space for the time and the vehicle's front-wheel drive. With the first Golf GTI (1976), Volkswagen initiated the dynamic development of the compact class. The Golf D (1976) and

the later Golf GTD (1982) ensured the breakthrough of diesel in the compact segment. In 1979, Volkswagen launched the Golf Cabriolet – for a time the best-selling convertible car in the world. This was like a breath of fresh air for this vehicle class, which had by then already long been known as the Golf class. A total of 6.9 million units of the first generation of the Golf, including all derivatives, were sold on all continents by 1983 – the Golf I thus proved itself to be a worthy successor to the Beetle.

Golf II – The milestone. Today's Volkswagen Chief Designer, Andreas Mindt, sums up the most important moment in the history of the Golf:

It was the switch from Golf I to Golf II. Volkswagen's then Chief Designer Herbert Schäfer did everything right there. He modernised the second Golf but kept the DNA of the first generation. This bridge is extremely important for the Golf's history. The Golf has always remained a further development of this original model. That is the special thing about the Golf, and the credit for this belongs to Herbert Schäfer.

Technologies such as the controlled catalytic converter, ABS and all-wheel drive made their debut in the Golf II. A total of 6.3 million Golf II cars were built between 1983 and 1991.

Golf III – Safety first. From August 1991, Volkswagen kick-started a new era of safety with the Golf III. This was the product line's first model available with front airbags from 1992, and great progress in the area of body design also led to significant improvements in its crash properties. A number of the product line's other milestones are associated with the Golf III, which had been built 4.8 million times by 1997: for example, the first six-cylinder engine (VR6), cruise control system and the first side airbags. For the first time, this Golf was also available as an estate model.

Golf IV – The style icon The Golf IV presented in 1997 is today considered to be a style icon – no doubt also due to the fact that it bridged the gap to the Golf I from 1974 with its clear features and the striking C-pillar design of the product line. With the Golf IV, Volkswagen achieved a new standard of quality within the segment. In parallel, the debut of ESP made a further contribution to making safety available to the masses. In 2002, Volkswagen also presented the sportiest Golf to date on the basis of the fourth generation: the R32 with a top speed of 250 km/h. In 2003, this was the first Volkswagen

to receive a direct shift gearbox (DSG). The Golf IV was replaced in the same year after 4.9 million units built.

Golf V – Class limits abolished. With its outstanding comfort, the fifth Golf – which was launched in 2003 – was miles ahead of many competitors in the upper mid-sized class. The same was true for quality. A value that underlined the stability of the laser-welded body was the 35-per-cent increase in torsional rigidity. For the first time, up to eight protective airbags were also on board. In addition, the Golf V, which had been built 3.4 million times by 2008, impressed with a new four-link rear suspension, bi-xenon headlights and the first 7-speed DSG.

Golf VI – High-tech compact class. By the end of July 2012, a further 3.6 million Golfs had been produced in only four years on the basis of the sixth generation that was introduced in 2008. And safety once again took a great leap forward: the again laser-welded body was so stable that it scored the maximum of five stars with flying colours in the Euro NCAP crash test. New technologies such as Light Assist (advanced main-beam control), Park Assist, Hill Start Assist and adaptive chassis control (DCC) made the 2009 ‘World Car of the Year’ one of the most advanced compact cars of its time.

Golf VII – Less weight, less consumption. In September 2012, Volkswagen celebrated the world premiere of the seventh Golf. Its weight was reduced by up to 100 kg compared with its predecessor, which meant that fuel consumption was also reduced by up to 23 per cent. New technologies such as the Automatic Post-Collision Braking System, Adaptive Cruise Control and Front Assist including City Emergency Braking System rounded off the range of assist systems. In 2014, Volkswagen set its course for the era of electric mobility with the new e-Golf. A total of 6.3 million Golf VII cars were produced up to 2019.

Golf VIII – The progressive modern era. Volkswagen presented the Golf VIII in October 2019. With its new mild and plug-in hybrid drives, it electrified the compact class. And as one of the first compact cars, it enabled assisted driving by means of Travel Assist. Even the entry-level version today has features such as Lane Assist, Front Assist, LED headlights, LED tail light clusters and automatic air conditioner on board as standard. In combination with the optional adaptive chassis control DCC and the vehicle dynamics manager, the Golf VIII

also achieves an unprecedented spread between comfort and dynamics in this class. More than one million units have been sold so far.

Now – in 2024 – the new evolutionary stage of the eighth generation has arrived. The new Golf impresses with a next-generation infotainment system, a more intuitive operating concept, a sharper front and rear end design as well as efficient drive systems. These include plug-in hybrid drives with an increased all-electric range of significantly more than 100 kilometres. An illuminated Volkswagen logo also adorns the front for the first time in a Golf. In addition, the new Golf with voice control and the AI-based chatbot ChatGPT once again makes technical innovations available to the masses.

Press release distributed by Wire Association on behalf of Volkswagen, on Mar 28, 2024. For more information subscribe and [follow](#) us.

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