

Auto EXPRESS FIRST UK DRIVE **FELICIA FUN**



PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

By Mike Askew

IT'S not often that a Skoda turns as many heads as a Ferrari, but the Felicia Fun certainly attracts plenty of attention. If the lurid yellow paintwork, matching alloy wheels and chunky bumpers aren't enough to make bystanders point, the bizarre second row of seats will.

It is fundamentally a Felicia pick-up with the rear bulkhead hinged to the back of the cab rather than welded. In standard form, the Fun is a regular pick-up with a decent load area and useful wooden slats lining the floor. But, with the pull of a handle and a good heave, the back of the cab moves from its regular position and fits into place just in front of the rear suspension turrets. Fold down the seat cushions, rearrange the seatbelts and hey presto – the Fun is converted to a four-seater.

Once folded out, the rear seats are surprisingly practical. Although thinly padded, they're comfortable, provide a reasonable amount of



Lurid yellow interior matches paintwork. Even with the fold-out rear seats in place, pick-up load area is useful



legroom and, of course, a superb view. The high rear screen means buffeting from the wind is virtually non-existent, and if the sun is out it's the ideal place to catch a few rays.

Unfortunately, the interior looks like an explosion in a custard factory. Yellow leather inserts and dubiously trimmed seats liven up the cabin, with the matching gearlever gaiter, dials and steering wheel completing the non-conformist effect. And the Fun doesn't quite live up to its name on the road. Skoda describes it as a 'flexible transport solution', and after steering the Felicia

over the New Forest's many cattle grids, that statement is difficult to argue against. Despite the addition of a well disguised and substantial roll bar above the passenger bench (painted yellow, of course) the Felicia really misses the solid bulkhead of the normal pick-up. As a result, it shimmies its way over poor road surfaces in a manner usually associated with 'proper' convertibles. At least the 1.6-litre, 75bhp engine is refined and packs a decent punch.

Skoda plans to import 300 Funs and is confident of finding buyers for every one. The firm reckons that cash-strapped sport utility buyers, or those looking for a more practical and er... fun alternative to the standard pick-up will give it a look.

Whether Skoda will find 300 buyers for a yellow pick-up with a frog on the B-pillar and a £9,999 price remains to be seen, but one thing is for certain, it will give people something to laugh about. The trouble is, few are likely to be owners. ●

Auto EXPRESS 1ST OPINION

DESPITE the Czech company's image overhaul, the words Skoda and fun are still rarely found in the same sentence. The Felicia Fun is an attempt to redress the balance, but falls short of the mark. A cheap sport utility with innovative seating sounds great on paper, but the concept falls flat and the Fun is not a wholly successful effort.

At a glance

- Skoda Felicia Fun based on standard pick-up. Available only in yellow
- Part-leather trim, alloy wheels and stereo included in £9,999 price
- Aimed at budget sport utility market
- Only 300 to come to the UK

NEW CAR NEWS

➔ THE new Volkswagen Golf will be the only car in its class to have four airbags and ABS standard on all models, giving the new Vauxhall Astra a run for its money. The range starts at £12,250 for the entry-level 1.4 E three-door – its group 4 insurance rating is three groups lower than the previous starter car. Other new Golfs follow this trend, with the 1.8-litre GTI now down to group 10E and the 1.8T-litre GTI at group 14E. All cars have three-year mechanical and 12-year corrosion warranties.

There's also good news for Passat buyers: for an increase of £115, they too now have four airbags and ABS as standard.

➔ ROVER aims to boost the appeal of its 200 and 400 ranges by introducing a special edition and increasing some standard equipment levels. The new 416LS has a 1.6-litre 16v K-series engine, plus leather seats, wooden trim, sunroof and electric front windows as standard, and costs £13,500.

Rover has also added front electric windows as standard to other models, including the £12,000 214iSE, which also has remote central locking and air-conditioning.

➔ DAEWOO has overtaken its big Korean rival Hyundai to become the best-selling passenger car manufacturer in its home country – for the first time in 25 years. Daewoo's success has much to do with its new Matiz mini car, which in April became the best-selling car in Korea. The Matiz, which is powered by an 800cc engine, will be pitched into the highly competitive European super-mini market in September.

➔ DAIHATSU has recorded an increase in production of 3.2 per cent for 1997 over the previous year, despite a struggling Japanese economy. In 1997 it exported more cars than any other Japanese maker, with an increase of 65.1 per cent over 1996. The majority of these went to North America.

So far this year, no Japanese manufacturer has managed to increase domestic sales, although Daihatsu has been least affected.



Fun doesn't live up to its name on the road due to excessive body shake

www.SkodaFeliciaFun.co.uk - a useful website for owners and enthusiasts of Skoda Felicia Fun Pickup Trucks