

Travel & motoring magazine



Special Channel Islands issue

Exploring Guernsey and Sark

Luxury Volkswagen Caravelle Executive

Sporty Skoda Octavia VRS



Since launching Travel and motoring magazine my family and I have been busy exploring new family friendly destinations.

We have visited Guernsey and Sark where the pace of life is much slower and more relaxed. On Guernsey the speed limit 35mph while on Sark no cars are allowed. How about that?

Still we do not know what is happening with Britain's Brexit woes and so focusing on the UK and its dependent territories as holiday destinations makes sense because you don't need passports yet still feel like you're abroad. Autumn always sees some attractive travel deals, too.

On the motoring front we have experienced some interesting vehicles including the Volkswagen Caravelle, which is perfect for family travel and the sporty Skoda Octavia VRS.

Travelling with family is a great way of discovering new places, cementing relationships and creating lasting memories, which can be talked about for years to come.

Tim Saunders
Editor

September 2019

Travel & motoring magazine
49 Church Close
Locks Heath
Southampton
SO31 6LR

www.travelwriter.biz

Cover: A signpost on Sark

CONTENTS

Travel

Guernsey - 4

Sark - 8

Motoring

Volkswagen Caravelle - 10

Skoda Octavia - 12



Fermain Valley Hotel, St Peter Port

St Peter Port, Guernsey

It takes under four hours to travel to Guernsey from Poole on Condor Ferries' Liberation, the sleek high speed trimaran. Built in Australia it can accommodate up to 880 passengers and 245 cars, travelling at 45mph (39 knots). Liberation reminds us of May 9, 1945 when The Channel Islands were liberated from Nazi occupation. It is a British Crown dependency.

We are travelling with our car and after some customs checks then parking up below deck we make our way to our pre-assigned seats in the Horizon Lounge where there are superb panoramic views. The children quickly discover the cinema room complete with beanbags where they can watch the

latest Incredibles film. We marvel at how this wide vessel cuts through the water with ease, regardless of what the seas are like. The crossing goes quickly and smoothly. We savour the approach to St Peter Port, which is both the main port in Guernsey and its capital. What will our holiday have in store? Travel is so exciting because you never know what's around the corner.

Disembarkation is a relatively speedy and organised affair, just like the boarding, and no sooner are we all strapped in, we're heading off the boat and driving towards our hotel.

Driving anywhere unfamiliar calls for heightened safety. Three noisy children in the back never

helps. The first thing we notice is the 35mph speed limit, which is quite reassuring. Old stone houses line many of the main roads. Our destination is the luxury four star Fermain Valley Hotel, only about 10 minutes from the port and easy enough to find with the help of our sat nav. The hotel is slightly off the main road where there's ample parking.

Check in is at 3pm. Our family room includes a king size double, double bed settee and a single guest bed, all very comfortable. The décor, featuring patterned wallpaper and rich flooring, is well maintained and elegant. The room is sizeable and has double doors from which we can access our



balcony, with views of the absolutely superb tropical gardens, reminiscent of the Eden Project in Cornwall. Not surprising to find out then that they were designed by the same team.

While the island is home to a five star hotel, it is hard to imagine how they can improve on the luxury that is Fermain Valley. The children quickly find the complimentary bottled water, fruit and biscuits. Caroline and I drop the luggage, slump in a chair and boil the kettle. Home. Relaxing never lasts longer than five minutes though. "I want to go outside," demands Henry (3). "Oh let's," agrees Heidi. What can you do? We drag ourselves back onto our weary feet and head out of the hotel, back to the car park where turning left out of the entrance leads down to Fermain Valley itself, with breathtaking views of the sea. Ideal for our picnic. Although friends had warned us that the weather was unlikely to be good, the sun is shining and we are savouring every minute.

Before long it's bedtime. While the little ones get down to the difficult business of sleeping, Caroline has a bath and I am able to make a start on my Inspector Rebus novel. Then it's my bath and bed. Very cosy beds, too.

At this point I must mention the chambermaid, who does a sterling job. Whenever we see her she is happily smiling and cheerful and returning to our room, it is

as if a fairy has visited and transformed it once again to wonderful order and tidiness. And then Henry and Heidi enter and it all goes to pot.

Rested, we go down to breakfast and are shown to our table. It's a wonderful experience. There's both continental and cooked from which to choose. When travelling, breakfast is the key meal, for me, so cereal, yoghurt, pain au chocolate, followed by The Fermain Valley Full English Breakfast sets me up for the day. Caroline follows suit with Eggs Benedict and avocado. It's a leisurely affair until Henry needs the toilet and then it's all over.

The complimentary hotel taxi service is a fabulous idea. We are able to book it to take us into town, avoiding the worry of walking on pavements that suddenly vanish into roads or driving and then finding a parking space. Damian, our driver, is helpful and knowledgeable. "I used to drive lorries in the Westcountry and arrived here 18 months ago not meaning to stay," he reveals. That's the great appeal of Guernsey.

At Saint Peter Port we mooch about and Caroline spots a clothes shop. She is awful about clothes shopping, preferring just not to do it because she's always disappointed at the quality. Anyway, she spies some things she likes and treats herself while Henry and I do some window shopping and admire the architecture and the narrow streets.





Off the beaten track, tucked up a hill, down a side street is the Duke of Normandie Hotel where we have a selection of sandwiches for lunch. Mine is Guernsey crab on brown bread, which is tasty. It's an unhurried, pleasurable experience.

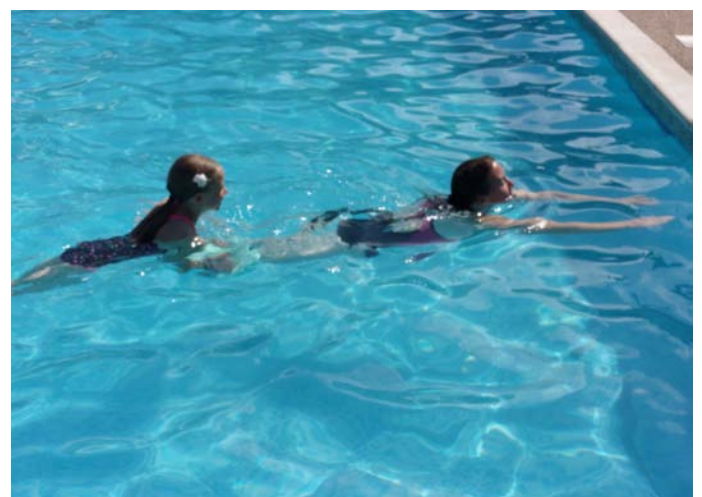
It's a good time to have a tour of the capital and there is no better way of doing this than on Le Petit Train. Owner and driver Andy Furniss has only recently acquired the business, which attracts 16,000 passengers a year. The train itself came from France and is powered by a new Iveco diesel engine, fitted by Andy, who runs six trips a day. He's all for collaborating with other independent local businesses and with this in mind is launching specialist rides for Christmas and other celebrations.

The hotel taxi promptly collects us from our drop off

point and back at the hotel we go for a dip in the indoor heated pool. What a pleasure. Whenever we choose to use it there are few other swimmers. If Caroline and I didn't have the children to look after we'd use the sauna, too. We visit the pool four times during our three night stay and this allows Harriett (8) to progress from using a float to ditching it completely, confidently swimming a width on her own. Heidi (6) and Henry all grow in confidence, too. It's a real joy to watch. After an hour the little rascals are ready for bed and so are we.

We have to be up and out earlier than usual on Monday morning because of catching a ferry to Sark at 10am. This is a trip of a lifetime. The ferry ride is 50 minutes and we spend the day on the island returning at 6pm. After a pleasurable walk around the magnificent gardens at Fermain Valley Hotel, which are home to so many different plants, shrubs and trees including Agapanthus, we sadly say goodbye.

But it's not over yet because we now must head to Hotel Peninsula in the Vale district, about 20 minutes away by car. This three star hotel has a large car park, a heated outdoor pool and a grand reception and dining room. There's a grand piano and three electric guitars hanging on the walls. The difference in star rating is noticeable between the hotels but it is still comfortable





and our interconnecting rooms allow for the children to be in one room and us in the other. The beach is literally just over the road and while the weather continues to be good to us we are able to spend many happy hours on it. The children dig, collect shells and make sandcastles. We are also able to go for some lovely walks, to Rousse Tower no. 11, a Pre-Martello Loophole Tower; one of 15 towers built around the island to defend it from attack by the French in the 18th century and you can see as far as France from it. Another walk to Vale Pond Nature Reserve where we spy some kingfishers. Fish and chips on the beach in the evening is another great experience.

We swim in the hotel's outdoor pool. The children's section is warmer than the main part but once we all brave it it is really enjoyable and we're all able to have a good swim; Harriett improving all the time.

After checking out of Hotel Peninsula we head for Oatlands Village, which isn't very far away. This is home to craft and pet shops but also an excellent 18-hole mini golf course which is a huge hit with Henry and all of us. To begin with Heidi despairs and then grows to like the whole idea. It's a great way to while away an hour or so with your family and the course has been really well designed, each hole providing a challenge and interest from the choice of plants

framing it. If you are able to pot your ball on hole 18 the ball vanishes into a box, which the children are mesmerised by.

There's just time to visit Oaty & Joey's Playbarn where the children let off more steam, particularly enjoying the large slide.

And then it's time to drive back to Saint Peter Port to board the Condor, which takes us back to Poole for around 730pm, which means the children are all soundly asleep by the time we arrive home.

For more information visit:

www.condorferries.co.uk

www.fermainvalley.com

peninsula.gg

www.visitguernsey.com/see-and-do/things-to-do/rousse-tower

dukeofnormandie.com

petittrainguernsey.co.uk

www.sark.co.uk

www.oatlands.gg

Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz





Trip to Sark

By Tim Saunders

The island of Sark is a 50-minute ferry crossing from Guernsey.

Having packed our picnic we board the Sark bound vessel at 10am from Saint Peter Port and look forward to our day ahead. The island promises peace and solitude thanks to there being no cars.

The only way to travel to Sark is by ferry because there is no airport. Between April and October the blue and white boat carries 45,000 return passengers. It quickly becomes apparent how choppy the seas are and the small vessel bobs up and down, the passengers watching the ever-changing scene of sea to sky and back through the windows. There is a distinct look of fear on all our faces that heightens the senses. Those of us who have travelled from mainland England on the comparatively smooth Condor Ferries trimaran might be just a little surprised at the choppiness of the Sark Shipping Company crossing. It certainly requires a strong stomach on this occasion. But this is to be expected when considering the small size of this

particular ferry. Little Henry (3) copes for the best part of the journey but the waves that push the boat repeatedly up and down do it once too often for his liking and a white bag is quickly passed his way. But his late great grandfather, a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy, would be proud. This situation does give us all greater understanding of what a seafarer's life is like and how hardy our fishermen have to be.

We arrive at Maseline Harbour and gratefully clamber off into the glorious summer sunshine. The toast rack tractor ride greets visitors but we choose to walk up the hill and along a track beside the road that introduces us to the island's delightful flora and fauna as well as insects such as grasshoppers and a stunning butterfly that we have not come across before. It is black all over with white lines down its wings, which it closes together when resting. When it flies off its delightful orange undercarriage is revealed. I try to video or photograph this but it moves too quickly.

We're never very far away from tractors so it is



necessary for the children, especially, to be vigilant when walking on the tracks around the island. In time we come to a pub, at the start of the main village. Ahead of us there are horses and carriages, offering island tours. Bicycles are another good way of travelling about, too. We rely on our feet, though and although Henry (3) needs the occasional piggy back and mummy cuddle, we muddle through, all the while savouring the wonderful landscape. In fact once Henry is bribed with daddy's brioche he agrees to walk and not have mummy carrying him. He finds a stick and leads the way. At the village centre we decide to turn left, which unknown to us leads past fields towards a wonderful secluded beach, Les Laches, where we arrive about an hour later. We walk down to it via steep steps and find that it is just us on this sandy paradise; a great location for our picnic. It's a relaxing time that sees us paddle and build a big sandcastle complete with its own moat. We play catch with Henry while Heidi does a bit of rock climbing near the idyllic waterfall. We watch kayakers and swimmers and two yachts arrive.

Before we know it it's 330pm and about time to set off back up the hill; we don't want to miss our return crossing at 6pm. Just before 5pm we arrive at Creux Harbour, a stone's throw from Maseline Harbour, where we must catch our ferry. Caroline and Harriett (8) look for crabs and sea creatures while Henry and Heidi (6) look for shells and stones. We find a red tractor and Henry and Harriett have to sit on it. While it might be possible to visit all parts of this two

square mile island in one day, we cannot. We have discovered that we can't be too demanding of our children otherwise the day is just not enjoyable. And so we only touch on the beauty of Sark.

But we leave all the better for this enriching experience that we will all remember for the rest of our lives.

We board the ferry back to Saint Peter Port, Guernsey where Henry sleeps and travels much better as a result.

More information at:

www.sark.co.uk

www.sarkshipping.gg

Watch the videos at www.travelwriter.biz





How to transport 7 people in luxury

By Tim Saunders

On seeing the Caravelle Executive my mind is transported back to the much loved T2 VW camper; you know the one with its split windscreen and great character often thanks to the use of a two tone exterior finish. I shouldn't be so sentimental; the two vehicles are quite different in both their look and size. But it's the beautiful blue and white paintwork that makes it eye-catching, in the same way as its predecessor, making many passers-by do a double take. It is exceedingly smart and a great surprise. After all this is basically a van, a commercial vehicle. And they are, by nature, dull and boring, aren't they? I was expecting something along the lines of a Ford Transit, practical without any character so to speak. But this T5 version continues VW's tradition of manufacturing attention seekers. They are very good at it.

It is large but surprisingly easy to drive. When it comes to reversing off our driveway which has a little incline, it does take quite a bit of gas to get moving but that's hardly surprising really.

I must mention though that on returning from the late night weekly shop, I open the massive boot and some of the shopping falls out, much to my infuriation and this is amplified when my reactions are too slow to save my beloved bottle of beer that smashes to smithereens. As the odour of a brewery pervades around the garden and I bemoan the loss of my precious pint, I think it would be extremely helpful to have a lip inside the boot that could be lifted to avoid such downright frustrating situations. I can see that having a flat space is easier to load heavy and awkward luggage into but that, as I prove, is not the

only situation that this versatile vehicle will be used for.

I test it during a time when the neighbours are having their driveway resurfaced and the builders cannot take their eyes off the VW. This resurfacing brings its own issues – such as builders vans partly blocking our driveway. On one occasion I get a bit fed up. A neighbour over the road from us always parks her car outside our house as well. Both of which means that it's a challenge to get onto our driveway and it shouldn't be the case. However, the Caravelle instils confidence in its driver thanks to its power steering, large power folding electric wing mirrors and reversing camera. It makes light work of this situation and we end up where we want to be without any issue whatsoever. That's impressive. And then the builder comes out and says: "Just ask and I'll move my van. By the way I'm going to be cutting the stones, you might want to move because there'll be a lot of dust." There are occasions in life when I question: "Why do I bother?!" So I park on the road, a little way from the house.

Driving the Caravelle draws my attention to others on the road. They are certainly a popular choice in my neighbourhood. This version is the Executive and seems higher up than the rest, which is great for driving, giving a good view of the road ahead. In fact when we pass an oncoming single decker bus we seem to be at the same height. It is similar to the vehicles used on The Apprentice TV programme these days and perfect, as the name suggests, for executive travel. Better in many ways than a standard saloon because there is room to stretch out and bags of space for luggage.

The size of the Caravelle demands a slightly revised driving style for me compared to how I drive my little Ford Fiesta. For instance, sometimes when there are vehicles parked on the roadside I do have to wait until it is clear to overtake them but to my surprise I don't have to do this too often because as I get to know it better it's actually not that wide.

It uses the popular 2-litre turbo diesel found in a range of VWs from the Golf to the Passat and the Touran. Despite its size and weight it will still shift, if required. It will travel from standstill to 60mph in 13 seconds flat, comparable to my smaller and less sophisticated 17 year old 1.4-litre diesel Fiesta. Of course the Fiesta cannot transport 7 occupants in real comfort. Each seat is well padded and covered in luxurious black leather. The front two are heated. The driver does have to be careful not to be overzealous with the accelerator when exiting a roundabout or side road otherwise the front wheels make some mean screeches. There is a delay when pushing your foot

down on the accelerator and the engine responding. This is resolved by engaging sports mode.

Inside, occupants are treated to masses of light thanks to its enormous windows. The front two are electric.

It is equipped with two vast electrically operated sliding doors, which make life very easy. The children absolutely adore this vehicle but although these doors are most definitely one of its greatest assets, it is vital that we keep more of an eye than usual on our three little ones. "Can I open it? Can I open it?" all three chant each time we approach the Caravelle. Give in and the action has to be repeated thrice in order to maintain peace and harmony in all the world, as that great sage Peppa Pig promotes.

The sliding doors can be opened and closed from the driver's seat, which makes a chauffeur's life so much easier. VW now just needs to make a robot to pack away any passenger's luggage. They're probably working on that.

I test this vehicle during a particularly testing time for our family. Caroline's dad John is recovering after a fall and during the test, her aunt, Betty, has a stroke, so the trusty Caravelle is called on to visit both.

Betty is in the acute stroke unit at Southampton General Hospital where it's necessary for me to stay in the van with the children while Caroline visits. The size of the interior means that the children can get themselves out of their seats and that there's enough space for them to play hide and seek. Little Henry figures out that there's a pop up table complete with cup holders between the rear seats and he enjoys reconfiguring the area so that it becomes a lounge/diner. It's a great use of space and some of the seats even have neat storage boxes underneath.

On the Tuesday morning Betty passes away when we had arranged to collect Caroline's mum Lin and dad John and take them to visit her. At least the family is all together though to talk things over. Climbing into the van John highlights an issue with, namely that the step to get in is far too high for an elderly person with leg trouble. A lower step would be really helpful. Fortunately, I have planned ahead and brought along my trusty little stepladder, which solves the problem perfectly. "Do you know this is the first time he has been out of the house, other than to the hospital, since the start of May?" says Lin (and this is the middle of July). The good that the Caravelle does; it literally brings a family together. John is visibly much better than he has been and we agree to visit the beach at Southbourne. We park up, have a picnic and toast Betty's life. We enjoy eating at the pop up table while gazing at a wonderful view through the opened sliding doors. With both sliders open a lovely breeze travels

throughout.

Afterwards, Henry (3) and I go for a walk and pick some blackberries, allowing the others time to talk and mull things over. While the others venture to a nearby bench for more of a natter, Henry and I stroll down to the beach and have a brief play on the soft sandy beach. Paradise. It is a beautiful beach with stunning views across the blue green sea and it's not too busy either. There's always one eye on the clock though when our daughters Harriett (8) and Heidi (5) need collecting from school. So we drop Caroline's mum and dad off at their house and then make our way to school, just in time for collection.

Overall, this is an impressive vehicle that quickly becomes a useful part of the family and it is easy to see how it could very easily become a welcome and much loved addition to any chauffeur business. My family and I feel very privileged to have spent time with the Caravelle.

Facts at a glance

Model tested: Volkswagen Caravelle Executive 2.0TDi

Price: £55,000

Top speed: 112mph

0-60mph: 13secs

Economy: upto 40mpg

Watch the videos at www.testdrives.biz



Sporty Skoda saloon

By Tim Saunders

"It's got the same electric seat as the Volkswagen van," observes my son Henry (3) on assessing the Skoda Octavia VRS Challenge. He's a clever lad. Previously, we had tested a VW Caravelle Executive and he's quite right about the driver's seat.

Economies of scale dictate that the Volkswagen Group, which owns 12 manufacturers including Skoda, Bentley and Seat, will use the same or similar parts and features across its range; a sensible idea.

Excellent quality is something that we have become used to from the Volkswagen family and this Skoda is another shining example (quite literally from that gorgeous velvet red metallic paintwork). I think the beautifully crafted black alloy wheels compliment this souped-up saloon adding to its boy racer appeal. "They look out of place on this car," says my artist wife, Caroline, who, it is fair to say, knows more about design than I do. "The shape of the car is quite bland yet the wheels look as if they should be on a totally different vehicle." Whatever her thoughts, a Jaguar XF parks next to the Skoda and the driver cannot take his eyes off the Skoda.

The Octavia has won legions of fans including the British traffic police, who can often be seen in them pulling speeding motorists over by the roadside.

The driving position is as I would expect; excellent and all my family agrees that it provides a very comfortable environment. There's adequate room in the rear for three passengers. But despite its size it's a real struggle strapping in my three children in their car seats. Dare I say it; it's easier in my Fiesta.

On the Skoda a push button ignition replaces the traditional key on the steering column. It is quick, especially when sports mode is engaged by pushing the VRS button; 0 to 60mph in 6.6secs and a 155mph top speed. Put your foot to the floor in second gear and it will reach 70mph as quickly as you can say 'Jack Robinson'. What a delight. I enjoy using the decisive six speed manual gearbox and there's a traditional handbrake.

It's the last day of the summer term for my daughters Harriett (8) and Heidi (6) and it makes a nice surprise for them to be collected from school in this cool, flash Skoda. But even this cannot stop siblings bickering. Henry wants Harriett's bag and there's no sharing happening so Caroline has to remove it. Peace is still not restored though. Children. We read the riot act



and sincerely hope that the summer holiday will be a time for peace and harmony. It needs to be because Caroline and I look at the forthcoming six weeks with a mixture of joy and dread as we have no help.

The following day we visit the library and the children select their six books each for the summer reading challenge. We pop them in the boot and I am aghast at the sheer size of it. Great for the holiday getaway and as I discover, a trip to the tip with an old cot that would not fit in my little car.

A new splash park has opened up at Lee-on-the-Solent - not too far from us – which is excellent in the summer heatwave, and so we visit, in the Skoda. There are crowds of people meaning that there is no parking. So we park a little way out by the roadside. These days when cars are fitted with such magnificent and expensive alloy wheels that can so easily get damaged when parking, it strikes me that a really helpful feature could be to include wheel sensors and cameras that detect and warn when the wheels get too near a kerb. Such technology could save owners many headaches.

While there is no reversing camera, the Octavia does beep when getting too close to obstacles, which can be helpful, if a bit irritating.

In the blistering summer heat a tilt/sliding glass

sunroof would be a very welcome addition for those of us who like a light cabin and to drive with fresh air throughout the car. However, on what is claimed to be Britain's second hottest day on record, we drive about very comfortably with all the windows shut and the air conditioning on full. It cools the cabin down very quickly.

The Skoda comes loaded with luxuries including heated front seats, cruise control, aluminium pedals, black exhaust tailpipes with sports sound and there's even an umbrella under the front passenger seat. At night there's some fun blue lighting on the door inserts.

This sizeable sports saloon is a top class driver's car but the overall experience could still be enhanced further, I feel.

Octavia VRS Challenge
Facts at a glance

Price: £30,770

Engine: 2.0 TSI

Power: 245bhp

Economy: 36mpg approx

Watch the video at www.testdrives.biz