

Volkswagen New Santana

MARK ANDREWS

China really loves the Santana and over 4 million of them have been sold here since 1983. But now production of the ubiquitous Shanghai taxi has reached the end of the line and the New Santana is on sale. Does it have what it takes to make China fall in love again?



Certainly whilst parked during our lunch break it attracted attention. The car itself is only slightly shorter than the original Santana and bigger in every other way, but is over 20 centimeters shorter than today's Santana Vista – the current standard taxi.

Based on a stretched version of the Polo platform, the new Santana is the first of a quartet of similar cars from the Volkswagen family due to hit the Chinese market over the next few months – the others being the new VW Jetta, Seat Toledo and Skoda Rapid. Externally, it is bland looking, but very much in keeping with the rest of Shanghai Volkswagen's range.

It's with the interior the package starts making more sense. Our top-of-the-range model came with a charcoal dashboard trimmed with fake wood and chrome – a split charcoal and tan trim is also available. As can be expected with a Volkswagen, the materials

are all good quality, but the plastics are on the hard side. Steering wheel mounted controls allow hands-free use of mobile phones via the Bluetooth connection and control of the stereo. One surprising omission is the lack of a sat nav with the stereo, which makes do with an old school monochrome button controlled display. The similarly sized and priced MG 5 comes with a large touch screen display, which also features a reversing camera.

Front occupants are treated to heated seats – a rare feature in a car of this size. There is also a fold down central armrest. As can be expected, there are electric windows, mirrors and sunroof, the latter can easily be manipulated for desired ventilation thanks to a dial control. The leather seats are comfortable and in the back there are three proper seatbelts. In a surprising touch, there

are fixing points for child seats. Safety in fact seems to have been a real consideration in the design with front and rear curtain airbags fitted – a common omission in China. Rear passengers have good legroom and only the tallest of passengers will have any problem with headroom.

Boot space is generous but it is also here the cost cutting is most obvious. For example, the seats are unable to fold down for longer loads and their backs are bare metal. Lack of lining also extends to the sides of the door pillars.

Current engine choices are limited to 1.4 and 1.6 liter petrol units; both available with a five-speed manual gearbox and, for the larger engine, a six-speed automatic. The automatic unit has quick, smooth changes. However, the sports mode on the gearbox, though it keeps the gears down longer, also makes it sound like a frustrated rally car. The whole

experience is disconcerting.

Steering is well weighted and, coupled with the platform's nimbleness, makes the car a pleasure to drive. On paper, the acceleration at 11.8 seconds for 0 to 100km/h sounds on the slow side, but in real world driving conditions it always seems more than adequate.

Overall, the car packs a lot of larger car features into a small car package. Couple this with its gutsy performance and it's very likeable. However, it remains to be seen whether this is enough to make up for some glaring equipment omissions and too much competition from overlapping models in the Volkswagen stable. Prices start at RMB 84,900 and range up to RMB 123,800. The Santana name might be a legend, but the new car's shorter length may reign in its repeated success as a taxi.

Le MERIDIEN
艾美酒店及度假村

PERFECTLY
CATERED
TO YOU

The gourmet teams at work at Le Royal Méridien Shanghai are also on hand to cater your private functions. Whether it's a corporate event, a wedding or a private occasion, we can provide you with anything from light lunches to grand buffets and banquets. Come in for a consultation and we'll take care of the rest.

For an appointment, call 3318 9999 ext. 8058

LE ROYAL MERIDIEN
SHANGHAI

789 NANJING ROAD EAST SHANGHAI 200001 CHINA
N 31° 14' E 121° 28'
T +86 21 3318 9999
lemeridien.com/royalshanghai

spg.
Starwood
Preferred
Guest

©2012 Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.
All Rights Reserved. Preferred Guest, SPG, Le Meridien
and their logos are the trademarks of Starwood Hotels
& Resorts Worldwide, Inc. or its affiliates.

