



Audi A4 2.0T Sedan

Four-Door Sedan For the Enthusiast Driver

BY CRAIG PETERSON

OCCASIONALLY WE'RE REMINDED THAT all-wheel drive isn't just for getting up a snowy driveway in wintertime.

Testing the new Audi A4 Quattro, we were passing a long line of traffic bottled up behind a truck on a two-lane highway. No worries until we came abreast of an SUV shuffling along immediately behind the 18-wheeler. As we drew alongside, without warning the driver simply yanked his vehicle into the left lane to pass. Accelerating hard, we flicked the Audi far onto the left shoulder, the two right wheels barely remaining on the pavement, and simply drove around the sport-ute, completing the pass without drama. Apart from solid whacks as the left wheels hit deep craters on the dirt shoulder and a shotgun blast of gravel peppering the floorpan, the episode was over in moments—and barely noticeable.

That's the advantage of having all four wheels pulling for you, backed by a

What's Hot

High-tech, fuel-efficient, torquey engine
World-class AWD and handling prowess
Extensive standard equipment

What's Not

Vague on-center steering feel
Large corporate schnozz

world-class Electronic Stability Control system. Even in the hands of an expert driver, a front- or rear-drive car in this predicament would be a handful to control, the outcome far from certain. In the Audi A4 Quattro it was just another day at the office.

Another part of the secret to the A4's nimble response is the excellent Sport Package—handsome 17-inch alloys, sticky high-performance footwear and Audi's superb sport suspension—a \$750 option and worth every nickel. Coupled with the six-speed manual transmission it turns an already capable sedan into a sporting machine. The ratios are close and the throws almost toggle switch-like in their directness, making the driving experience much like being in an Audi TT coupe with a four-door sedan body attached.

Inside, the cabin is largely a carry-over, tastefully appointed with leather and ebony wood. New is a chrome accent extending from the door panels across the dash, helping to visually brighten the interior. There's also brightwork on the console around the shifter base and on the shifter knob itself, helping to lighten-up an interior that in past

years has been a bit somber.

The seats are a little wide for spirited driving but supportive and comfortable enough for all-day drives. And there's a generously-sized dead pedal to help keep the serious driver anchored during high-G maneuvers.

The navigation system (\$1,950) is the first genuinely useful design we've seen; it actually allows driver inputs while in motion. Our test car also had the Lighting Package (\$1,425) which adds bi-xenon headlights that are self-leveling to compensate for heavy loads, memory for driver side seat and the heated outside mirrors, plus other goodies. The \$1,000 Audio Package adds a killer Bose sound system and the entertaining XM Satellite Radio system. All up, the test car totaled \$37,995. At that price there's some serious competition today but the A4 is up to the task.

Dimensionally the new A4 is little changed; rear legroom is reasonably good, headroom is adequate and the trunk enormous, its flat floor and low liftover making it truly useful. With the 60/40 rear seat folded, the A4 swallowed several hundred pounds of bulky video production gear that we normally transport by truck. And there was still room for a passenger.

The new Audi A4 shines as a cross-country cruiser.

This A4 also sports a new engine, the 2.0-liter FSI inline four-cylinder. Injecting fuel at very high pressure directly into the cylinder, much like a diesel, accompanied by an unusually high 10.5:1 compression ratio and backed by a fast-reacting turbocharger, the torquey four-cylinder delivers the performance of a 3-liter V-6 with outstanding fuel economy to boot.

Most noticeable is the extraordinarily wide, flat torque curve with the full 207 foot-pounds on tap from 1,800 to 5,000 rpm. The maximum 207 horsepower arrives between 5,100 and 6,000 rpm.

On the road, it pulls capably from just off-idle but there's a noticeable increase in thrust after the turbocharger has reached full boost around 3,500 rpm. From there to 6,000 rpm it pulls like a turbo-diesel, which is entirely the point of the exercise.

Matched to the six-speed's carefully chosen ratios, the flat power curve leads it to perform far better than any two-liter four-cylinder sedan we've driven.

An eminently capable everyday commuter, the new Audi A4 shines as a cross-country cruiser, inhaling huge chunks of open highway with ease, a task that's assisted by its superb fuel economy and long range. (We saw 29 mpg and 465 miles of range in very hard driving.) There's little wind noise, virtually no mechanical noise.

The steering is accurate with decent feedback although it's a bit vague on-center, something we've not noted in the V-6-powered versions, particularly the sensational S4 4.2-liter, 340hp sports sedan. But the A4's sport suspension—much of it borrowed from the S4—plus its slippery aerodynamics and long-legged gearing make it an excellent candidate for hushed, rapid transit over any type of road, preferably one with plenty of curves.

Encounter trouble, like we did, and the Audi A4 Quattro steps in instantly to help out. Just one of a long list of stellar attributes in our book.