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Audi A7 Sportback – Road Test

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Svelte looking high tech Audi A7 Sportback test-driven...

...by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Bristling with the latest technologies, high performance, striking coupé five door styling, impeccable quality high class interior and muscular performance, the second generation Audi A7 Sportback is on sale with of course premium brand pricing.

The newcomer is likely to appeal to customers who want all the latest high-tech features but don't fancy driving, or being driven in, an Audi A6 or A8 saloon. These are models more



suited to chauffeuring business execs than providing a more involving high performance driving experience desired by the affluent owner who wants to drive rather than be driven. The A7 Sportback fits that 'want'.

Launched in the spring of this year, initially with two engine choices, the 55 TFSI 3.0 litre V6 petrol with 340 hp or the better selling 50 TDI 3.0 litre V6 286 hp turbodiesel engine options, Audi UK have just added a 45 TDI 3.0 V6 231 hp engine to the line-up. All versions have as standard a 48-volt mild-hybrid system which reduces fuel consumption and lowers emissions, mated with an eight-speed tiptronic automatic gearbox and quattro all-wheel drive system.

All engines currently on offer come with the choice of Sport and S line spec levels and prices start from £52,240 to £58,155 for the best selling 45 TDI and 50 TDI diesel engines, with the 55 TFSI petrol models starting at £55,155 for the Sport version and £58,055 for the S line variant. Even though equipped as standard with the latest semi-autonomous driving elements, the advanced connectivity and driving support functions and most spec most users would expect to find, as always there is a comprehensive choice of extra cost options which could tempt buyers to significantly increase these prices if they get carried away enhancing their model of choice.

Talking of choice, even for a niche model range more engines and trim levels will join the line-up, including four-cylinder engine units, a plug-in hybrid and higher performance S and RS variants.

The first A7 Sportback was launched in 2010 and followed the A5 Coupé. The latest generation with its five door coupé body style sits between the A6 and A8 saloons and uses an evolution of Audi's MLB Evo platform, shared with the new A8. With its longer wheelbase it's now a grand-tourer rather than an out-and-out sports coupé. Its main rivals of course are German brand models - the Mercedes CLS and the BMW 6 Series Gran Coupé.



Although not as practical as the A6/A8 saloons in terms of people-carrying, the A7 more than makes up for that with its 4,969 mm (16.30 ft) long coupé styled body, giving it a svelte long and low athletic look with wide stance; it looks firmly planted on the road. It's more agile than the heavyweight and substantial A8 saloon so that will appeal to affluent owners who enjoy driving and the new model just eats up miles with elegant ease. Passengers are not short-changed for room either. There is more than ample room up-front both in terms of legroom, headroom and width with the overall cabin length increased by 21 mm (0.83 in) and the wheelbase by 10 mm (0.39 in). It doesn't sound much but it translates into a less claustrophobic interior. The rear seat headroom is not as ample as that of the front seating positions but even at six feet in height my head was still not touching the coupé roof lining.



The rear seats are divided 40-20-40 so there is ample width for two adults in nicely contoured seats with a smaller, firmer central seating position for a child if required. At the rear is a well-shaped boot offering 535 litres (18.89 cu.ft) carrying capacity and the tailgate lifts high for easy access. The rear seat backs can be folded down to increase the load capacity to 1,390 litres (49.09 cu.ft). Visibility is generally good but there are blind-spots to the rear corners and the steep angle of the tailgate window restricts the rear visibility, but that is offset by the front and rear view camera and that extends to providing side-vision during parking as well.

Outside the new A7 Sportback continues the latest Audi styling theme of a wide low front, prominent Audi grille, chiselled and sculpture styling lines leading from the bonnet, along the front wings and side, neatly flowing to the wide rear haunches and continuing across the rear end. The coupé side profile with frameless side windows completes the premium design.



Inside is the latest incarnation of Audi's Virtual Cockpit and it mirrors the design of the new A8 saloon which can be customised for display formats, with umpteen choices of mood lighting themes. In the centre of the console is a dual screen infotainment system. The upper 10.1 inch screen has the usual sat-nav, radio, smartphone connectivity and other functions, which can be a bit complex to fathom out initially and sometimes slow to react, whilst the lower 8.6 inch unit controls the heating and ventilation functions. However, when the system is switched off the screen is left marked with greasy fingermarks.

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There are the usual buttons and controls mounted on the steering wheel, whilst there are the usual stalks and gearshift paddles mounted on the column behind the wheel. Generally these are logical but the one downside is that the extra left temperature gauge and extreme right fuel gauge are masked by the steering wheel rim.

The specification is comprehensive without delving into the vast option list. In addition to the driving support systems such as emergency braking, lane keep assist and blindspot monitoring, the entry-level Sport trim spec includes full LED headlights, 19-inch alloy wheels, front and rear parking sensors with a reversing camera, cruise control, electric leather front seats, sat-nav, DAB radio, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto smartphone connectivity and a power operated tailgate. The S line level's additions include adaptive LED lights, 20-inch wheels, sports suspension, sportier exterior and interior styling.





Even allowing for this comprehensive standard specification my 50 TDI S line test car had lots of extra cost options which increased the on-the-road price from £58,155 to £77,360. The most useful of these was the £2,000 adaptive air suspension system which irons out shocks from our poor road surfaces to some extent, although I'm told it 'blunts' the sharp handling somewhat. That said the £1,900 dynamic four wheel steering option gave the A7 true running lines through fast cornering driving, and precise manoeuvrability in cluttered traffic congested streets and during kerbside parking. The £1,600 panoramic sunroof will suit some buyers but not all and the £1,100 HD Matrix LED headlights with Audi laser light certainly lights the road ahead during high speed night time driving. A full leather trim pack will add another £950 to the total cost and £450 will provide privacy glass. It is the usual story with all brands these days – that even with expensive top spec cars there are still more items to be added, some of which should really be standard.





For no logical reason I can find the figure 50 prefixes the 3.0 litre V6 turbodiesel engine. This unit produces 286 hp and a massive 620 Nm (457 lb.ft) of torque from 2,250 rpm. Drive is through an eight-speed tiptronic auto gearbox with Manual and Sport modes through to the usual Audi quattro all wheel drive system. All engines for the A7, like the A8, now use a mild-hybrid 48-volt system to improve fuel economy and reduce emission. And it also refines and speeds up the intelligent stop-start system. The mild-hybrid system allows seamless coasting for long periods on the overrun between 34 and 99 mph, and the energy through this function and regenerative braking is stored in a battery pack for use to boost engine performance when needed. The intelligent start-stop stops the engine from 13 mph while moving up to stationary traffic and uses a camera to start it again once it has detected the traffic in front has started to move onwards again. All very clever and very useable in today's congested traffic conditions.

As for performance the TDI turbodiesel engine is relatively hushed, no clatter on start-up and exceptional refined under acceleration. The top speed is limited to 155 mph with zero to 62 mph taking 5.7 seconds.

As for fuel economy the Combined Cycle figure is 48.7 mpg and during my week of test driving the overall figure was 38.4 mpg, but during a longer run using a motorway and A roads the journey returned an impressive 43.2 mpg - which given the size, the power and the performance of this vehicle was very acceptable. The CO2 emissions figure of 150 g/km is equally impressive for the same reasons so VED First Year diesel road tax costs £515 and then £140 Standard rate. But to that figure has to be added the usual £310 five year annual supplementary cost as the A7 costs more than £40k. Company car executives will pay 35% Benefit-in-Kind tax. Insurance is rated as Group 45E and the warranty given the vehicles price is an ungenerous three years/60,000-miles.

VERDICT

The Audi A7 Sportback is a high class comfortable and stylish high-speed grand-tourer that eats up long distant mileages with ease. It competes in a very niche sector of the new car market so there is the scarcity value to be added into the ownership proposition and that



element is a desirable one.

For: Stylish, high-speed roomy and comfortable cruiser, beautifully made with a high quality interior, high standard specification, strong engine with clever mild-hybrid element, acceptable realistic fuel economy.

Against: A cruiser more than a sharp handling sports coupé, some extra cost options should be standard fit so it can become expensive to buy/lease, fiddly infotainment system and messy heating/ventilation touchscreen, some hidden dials masked by the steering wheel rim, restricted rear/rear-quarter visibility, ungenerous warranty.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Audi A7 Sportback 50 TDI quattro 286 hp, S line quattro five door coupé.

Price: £58,155 (£77,360 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 3.0 litre, V6, 286 hp TDI turbodiesel, 620 Nm (457 lb.ft) of torque



from 2,250 rpm, eight speed tiptronic auto, quattro 4WD.

Performance: 155 mph, 0-62 mph 5.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.7 mpg (38.4 mpg overall on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 150 g/km, VED First Year diesel road tax £515 then Standard rate of £140 + £310 supplement for five years, BiK company car tax 35%.

Insurance Group: 45E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,969 mm (16.30 ft), W 1,908 mm (6.26 ft), H 1,422 mm (4.67 ft), wheelbase 2,926 mm (9.60 ft), boot/load space 535 to 1,390 litres (18.89 to 49.09 cu.ft), five doors, four/five seats.