



Audi Q7 Road Test

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Keith Ward tries the largest of Audi's SUVs, the Q7, in the north of England...

THIS was the most enjoyable drive of my year so far. Two reasons:



the transport and the territory.

Four versions have until recently formed the Audi Q7 range, all with quattro permanent 4WD and offering three levels of trim and a lusty V6 turbo diesel tuned to either 218 or 272 PS, at prices dotted around £50,000.

Latest editions coming on stream now include the Audi Q7 e-tron quattro as a plug-in diesel-electric hybrid with claimed 156 mpg “capability”; but five seats only at £65,000. There’s also a new 435 PS, biturbo V8 “S” Q7 TDI flagship claiming 0-62 in 4.9 seconds, at £70,000-plus.



Standard trim includes the latest MMI Navigation Plus with an 8.3-inch retractable monitor



and a fingertip-reactive touch pad, drive select, parking system plus and powered tailgate. Upgrade options include such as a virtual cockpit, the admired Audi adaptive air suspension and – claimed as a first in this segment – all-wheel steering.

Being the biggest of Audi's expanding choice of SUV's, the Q7 is lofty, enough for it to challenge the shorter-legged passenger, stretching to enter or exit. Once inside that beautifully furnished body, the reward is a cossetting comfort and oodles of room, either for seven occupants in its three rows of sumptuous leather seats, or for almost 2,000 litres (70.63 cu.ft) of luggage if you are riding two up.

Even the rearmost pair of chairs, which can be raised from the floor electrically, are no kiddy perches as commonly found with this layout, but adult-friendly, with armrests.





The upholstered boot is extra wide at well over a metre (3.28 ft) and the floor extends, at successive lowering of the seats, to eventually exceed a flat 1.7 metres (5.58 ft). This is practical, big-family motoring.

You get chromed roof rails, but while there are tethering hooks in the boot, no net is provided to stop your luggage from sliding around. It will not be the first time you are browsing the options catalogue to fulfil your personal demands.

This car is big. In fact, with a nod to the current hit film, the Q7 could be dubbed the BFG (Big Friendly Giant) of Audi's world.

However, increased use of aluminium in the imposing body shell means it's lighter than its predecessor by up to 325 kg (716.5 lb), less thirsty and "bristling" with new technology which includes a suite of the latest driver assistance systems, making their debut with the Audi brand and set to rapidly cascade down to other models.

Our car came with the entry-level SE trim, which includes sat-nav, DAB radio linked to a 10-speaker sound system, electric and heated front seats with four-way electric lumbar support, cruise control, light and rain sensors, parking aids, hill descent control and a refreshingly easy-to-use infotainment system, worked via a rotary dial between the front seats. These, in our car, were optional sport jobs in black leather and alcantara, a £1,900 extra.

The standard Audi drive select system offers a choice of five driving modes. In the "efficiency" setting the transmission is disengaged whenever the driver eases off the throttle, so the Q7 "coasts" to save fuel. Our overall figure during a week, including some spirited driving, was 38 mpg.

Other options which helped quickly boost the showroom price by a cool £10,000 included deluxe four-zone climate control (you may feel you need four zones in all that space) plus fashionable Audi Matrix LED headlights (£2,450), a top Bose 3D sound system and a £500 rear-view camera. Again, the latter you might have expected as part of the basic spec.



Our car had the latest 218 PS version of the 3.0-litre V6 turbo diesel, enough to punch it to 62 mph in a respectable 7.3 seconds, and allied to a smooth, eight-speed tiptronic automatic box.

Indeed, smoothness is a virtue of the Q7 which, for its size, proved impressively well-balanced and light on its feet in pretty demanding territory – a scramble of winter-ravaged B-roads up the spine and across the shoulder blades of Northern England; roads in places marked by snow poles, straddled by rattling sheep grids, restricted in many places to single file and offering a fairground ride of twists and dips followed by crests which suddenly replace the horizon spanning your windscreen with acres of sky.

Starting from Settle in North Yorkshire, your waypoints can be Ribbleshead, Hawes, Kirkby Stephen, Brough, Middleton-in-Teesdale, Wearhead in Weardale and a climb up to Alston in Cumbria, the highest market town in England.

Who says Britain is overcrowded? It's not here in the great wilderness of the North Pennines. Other vehicles are few and far between. On a day of clear skies in high summer it is glorious, with huge views. In winter, be warned, it can be pretty bleak. After an overnight stay, an option for an easy return south is to wind your way down to Penrith and the M6, or eastward on A-roads to the A1/M1.

This time, don't expect to have the road to yourself.

VERDICT

As I said at the beginning, THIS was the most enjoyable drive of my year so far...



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Audi Q7 3.0 TDI quattro SE.

Body: SUV; five doors; seven seats 2-3-2.

Size: 5,052 mm (16.57 ft); width 1,968 mm (6.46 ft); height 1,741 mm (5.71 ft); kerb weight 2,060 kg (4,542 lb); braked towing weight 3,500 kg (7,716 lb).

Boot Length 520 to 1,140 to 1,730 mm (1.71 to 3.74 to 5.68 ft); min width 1,080 mm (3.54 ft); vol 770 to 1,995 litres (27.19 to 70.45 ft).



Engine: Diesel; V6 2,967cc; turbo. Power 218 PS @ 3,250-4750 rpm; torque 369 lb ft (500 Nm) @ 1,250-3,000 rpm.

Transmission: 8-speed tiptronic auto; 4WD; stop-start.

Pace: 134 mph; 0-62 in 7.3 secs.

MPG: On test 38.0; official combined 48.7; tank 75 litres (16.50 gallons).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 150 g/km; Road Tax Band F; VED £145; latest EU6 emissions.

Tyres: 255/55 Conti Sport Contact on R19 alloys.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles; paint 3 years; rust-through 12 years.

Service: Every 19,000 miles.

Price: £46,925 (as tested, including options, £57,330).

Rivals (7-seater versions, prices from): Volvo XC90 £45,750; BMW X5 £45,855; Land Rover Discovery £40,960.