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Audi S1 2.0 TFSI quattro Road Test

Published: October 5, 2016

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Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/audi-s1-2-0-tfsi-quattro-road-test/>



A happy-smile-producing 'pocket rocket' from Audi, assessed by Chris Adamson.



(All words and photos by Chris).

The best things they say come in small packages and that is certainly my experience having been let loose in Audi's baby pocket rocket, the latest S1 quattro.

Earlier this year I was given the opportunity to blast around parts of Northamptonshire in a selection of high performance models from prestige brand Audi, including its thundering £130,000 R8 V10 - but, when it came to sheer adrenaline-fuelled driving pleasure, the winner hands down was this entertainment packed three-door hatchback.

It can sprint to 62 mph in 5.8 seconds, take fast corners in its stride, has a firm but forgiving ride and most importantly, responds quickly to every driver input without a murmur of opposition.

Admittedly not the most glamorous looking of small cars, the S1 is definitely more substance over style, but it is not unpleasing to the eye and certainly easy to live with.



Inside the cabin is comfortable if not exactly luxurious and it is well specified with the likes of air conditioning, satellite navigation and a good information read-out, while not overladen with gimmicks and unnecessary pieces of kit.



In standard form the basic S1 comes for a price knocking on the door of £25,000, and to this you can add in items such as the smart 18 inch parallel spoke Star S design alloy wheels (£650), heated front seats (£215), a sophisticated technology pack (£1,495) BOSE surround sound system (£690) and quattro exterior and interior styling packs costing £1,245 and £1,695 respectively.

As well as being fun, the S1 is also highly practical. The three-door version as tested here (there is a five-door Sportback version costing £735 more) offers a manageable 210 litre (7.42 cu.ft) boot which can grow to 860 litres (30.37 cu.ft) with the rear seats reclined, although the high up and over sill does mean heavy objects need a bit of a heave in and out.



On the Road

To give it a sub-six seconds time to the 62 mph sprint the S1 is powered by a 231 PS, 2 litre four-cylinder direct injection petrol engine, with exhaust turbocharger and intercooler, and four valves per cylinder.



This has a nice refined burble when the throttle is depressed which grows as the speed rises, but never becomes intrusive as you see legal speed limits come up in a matter of moments.



Slotting the motive force of more than 200 horses to all four wheels is the task of a slick six-speed manual transmission that is a joy to use, a quick dip on the clutch and a fast throw of the gear lever and you are on your way without hardly a pause for breath.

The S1 doesn't always have to be driven at frenetic speed and in urban situations is calm and composed and not especially thirsty, as a Combined figure of a very respectable 40 mpg demonstrates.



The only downside for economy-minded motorists is that all that power comes with the penalty of emissions registering 162 g/km, which means the Chancellor will want his pound



of flesh when it comes time for road tax.

The S1 is the first series subcompact to come with the reassurance of quattro four-wheel drive, giving it enough traction to feel you can safely push it harder into and through corners than you would with a conventional front-wheel drive hatchback (the laws of physics still apply, of course...).

Combined with the MacPherson strut front and four-link rear suspension layout, the chassis is well damped to iron out most road imperfections without ever putting too much bounce into the springs, allowing drivers to make the most of the power on tap.





Gripping the three spoke, flat bottomed leather finished multi-function steering wheel (a £250 extra) drivers feel fully in charge at all times.

And for those occasions when the S1 becomes a little nervous, big dual-circuit ventilated disc brakes (highlighted by the optional red brake callipers costing £315) supported by electronic brake-force distribution and an electronic differential lock, bring things under control.

Verdict

The S1 is one of the most enjoyable small cars you could wish to drive, as fast as a greyhound out of a trap, as agile as an antelope and always enthusiastic and eager to please.

I challenge anyone to take a drive in the S1 on a twisting, traffic-free country road not to step out of this car without a huge grin on their face.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec. in Brief:

Vehicle: Audi S1 2.0 TFSI Quattro.

Engine: 1984cc TFSI petrol.

Transmission: Six-speed manual, four wheel drive.

Power: 231 PS @ 6,000 rpm.



Torque: 370 Nm (273 lb.ft) at 1,600 to 3,000 rpm.

Performance:

0-62mph: 5.8 seconds.

Top Speed: 155 mph.

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 31 mpg.

Extra-Urban: 48.7mpg.

Combined: 40.4 mpg.

CO2 Emissions: 162 g/km

Price (On the Road), from: £25,600 (£30,840 with extras, as tested).