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Audi SQ5 Turbocharged TSFI – Road Test

Published: January 4, 2018

Author: David Miles

Online version: <https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/audi-sq5-turbocharged-tsfi-road-test/>



New Audi SQ5 349 bhp turbocharged TFSI petrol SUV flagship. David Miles (Miles Better News Agency) assesses this impressive machine.

The previous generation SQ5 was a V6 335 bhp TDI turbodiesel model and the first 'S' model to have a TDI diesel engine in the UK, also the first Q model to be available with 'S' performance specification. The latest Q5 range went on sale earlier in 2017, followed later in the year by the new 'S' flagship version, powered by a 3.0 litre V6 TFSI turbocharged 349 bhp petrol engine.

The latest Q5 range with 2.0 litre TFSI, 2.0 litre TDI and 3.0 litre TDI engines, all with automatic transmissions and quattro all-wheel drive, range in price from £38,035 up to £45,835 through SE, Sport and S line spec levels depending upon the engine chosen. The



SQ5 has its own one high level of spec and costs £51,200.

The outgoing SQ5 TDI turbodiesel accounted for around 20% of Q5 sales in the UK so there was no shortage of affluent customers wanting a high spec, pacey, potentially fuel-efficient SUV. However early orders for the new SQ5 V6 TFSI turbocharged petrol variant are accounting for 10% of new Q5 sales, say Audi UK. That will equate to around 1,000 sales by the end of this year. Launch timings for a future SQ5 TDI are to be confirmed and Audi says it made sense to fill the void whilst a new TDI engine was being developed to offer the TFSI petrol engine instead. Global demand will dictate whether or not the two engine options will run concurrently in future.



Actually to call the Q5 an SUV (Sports Utility Vehicle) doesn't do justice to its high specification, high class interior quality or to its main role in life as a relatively roomy five door practical family car with elevated ground clearance. The word Utility doesn't really apply, perhaps 'Crossover' is more appropriate as it's a taller member of the Audi A4 and A5 family. Competitors include the go-faster high spec versions of the BMW X5, Mercedes GLC, Jaguar F-Pace and Porsche Macan.

The new Audi SQ5 is 4,671 mm (15.32 ft) long, 1,893 mm (6.21 ft) wide and 1,635 mm (5.36 ft) tall and the wheelbase is 2,824 mm (9.27 ft) so the rear seat legroom is enough but not



generous. The SQ5 has a kerb weight of 1,995 kg (4,398 lb) which is 35 kg (77 lb) less than its predecessor, due in part to the lighter petrol engine and the use of aluminium and high strength steel body construction.

The telltale styling changes over standard models include stronger contoured front and rear bumpers, air inlets in the front lower front bumper, a prominent large honeycomb front grille with aluminium slats and surrounds, and a diffuser at the rear, together with twin exhaust tailpipes either side of the vehicle, extending from the dual branch exhaust system. Subtle use of the 'S' logo is used in various points as well as V6T badging around the vehicle. LEDs are standard for all lighting functions including the signature dynamic indicators and Matrix headlights.

The interior is Audi's usual high class and impeccable quality and includes illuminated door sills bearing exclusive 'S' logos. Contrasting stitching on the leather steering wheel and sport seats enhance the elegant ambiance. The 'S' sport seats are upholstered in high quality Nappa leather with a diamond pattern. Brushed aluminium inlays are standard with a variety of wood applications and an exclusive carbon inlay available as options. Aluminium look steering column mounted shift paddles are included as are stainless steel pedals and foot rest.

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The rear seat is split into three segments and longitudinal and seat back angle adjustment is optional. Depending on the position of the rear seat bench the luggage compartment has a standard capacity of 500 to 610 litres (17.66 to 21.54 cu.ft) but when the rear seat backs are folded down this volume grows to 1,550 litres (54.74 cu.ft).

Standard equipment includes 20-inch alloy wheels, privacy glass with acoustic glazing for the front windows, specific damper controlled suspension, auto high beam assist, electrically operated front seats, MMI Navigation Plus, Audi Connect and Audi Drive Select modes. Also fitted as standard are automatic Pre-Sense City Braking, Lane Keep Assist, Audi

Parking System and Audi's Virtual Cockpit layout with its central touchscreen protruding upwards from the fascia panel, and the ability to customise the display of controls and information in the instrument binnacle in front of the driver.

Needless to say there are extra cost options and my test vehicle had numerous which pushed the on-road price up from £51,200 to £69,285. Some of the most costly extras were the Sport differential at £1,200, Head Up display at £900, Adaptive Cruise Control at £750 and 21-inch alloy wheels at £1,500.



At the heart of the new SQ5 is of course the engine. The new 3.0 litre TFSI petrol unit is the successor to the unit first used by the S4 and S5 but the supercharger is replaced with a new twincscroll turbocharger located within the 90degree V of the cylinder banks. Not only does this engine supply 354 hp but also a huge 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque available from



1,370 rpm right through to 4,500 rpm. With standard 20-inch wheels it can deliver up to 34 mpg in the Combined Cycle and my week long driving, using long and short journeys and higher speed motorway driving, returned an overall 28.2 mpg – and much of that was done in Efficiency mode due to driveability characteristics (more of that later) and traffic conditions. Top speed is restricted to 155 mph but it can be derestricted to 174 mph and zero to 62 mph takes just 5.4 seconds.

With its standard 20-inch wheels the CO2 figure is 189 g/km so VED First Year rate is £800 followed by the Standard rate of £140 – plus the £310 a year for five years supplement as the vehicle costs more than £40k. However if the 21-inch optional alloy wheels are chosen not only do they cost an extra £1,500 but the Combined Cycle fuel economy goes down a shade to 33.2 mpg, closer to my test drive figure of 28.2 mpg, and the CO2 figure goes up to 195 g/km. This increases VED to a whopping £1,200 First Year rate and then £140 plus £310. Company car Benefit-in-Kind tax goes up from 36% to the maximum 37% as well.

An eight-speed tiptronic automatic transmission suits the linear power delivery of the V6 engine. The lower gears feature short ratios while the upper gears are long in the interest of fuel economy. If required the transmission can freewheel as soon as the driver lifts off the accelerator at speeds of between 34 mph and 99 mph for even better fuel efficiency. The SQ5 is naturally quattro all wheel drive equipped, so during normal driving the system distributes power with a slight rear axle bias, but when necessary it can divert the majority to whichever axle has better traction. It is backed up by wheel selective torque control which slightly brakes the inside wheels during faster cornering to tuck the SQ5 into the bend. For even greater adjustability and agility a sport differential is also available for £1,200 on the options list. It actively distributes torque between the rear wheels helping to literally push the car into bends and to contain understeer. Its management is integrated into the Audi drive select control system.

Also controllable via Audi drive select is the electronically regulated 'S' suspension, using an adaptive CDC damping (continuous damping control) setup. This system allows the driver to adapt damper response to suit the driving situation, offering a more compliant setting for



everyday cruising and a tauter and more dynamic mode for faster, more challenging driving. On top of that for an extra £1,000 the customer can choose the 'S' adaptive air suspension option which also operates through the Audi drive select system. This can lower the ride height for enhanced on-road handling and it can raise the vehicle for off-road driving.

So the SQ5 is a technology tour-de-force with performance to match but at a high price. Whether it's worth the extra cost over the popular and revised normal Q5 mid-sized SUV is down to freedom of choice which thankfully still exists in the car market, but for how much longer as we move to fuel efficient, driverless and mundane transport?



When the SQ5 was delivered to me by the man from Audi HQ, to get him on his return



journey I took him to the local train station. Sitting in the driver's seat for the first time, pressing the starter button was greeted with a raucous exhaust note. I selected Drive and off we went but it was like a thoroughbred racehorse frantically wanting to be let loose. A touch of the throttle and it leapt forward, it snatched gears, the steering was sharp to excess and the ride really uncomfortable. OK it's not supposed to be like this I thought, not for everyday use. On my return home I delved into the drive select system, selected Efficiency mode and then went further into other Individual settings. All were in Dynamic mode, no doubt done to showcase the storming performance potential for my first SQ5 driving experience. Having 'softened' all the settings, driveability returned without any great loss in performance particularly given the traffic congestion we endure and the broken road surfaces which prevail.

The engine was a joy and fun to use, the roadholding good with quattro traction, the steering precise but lacking in feedback, and the ride more compliant than in Dynamic mode, despite the larger 21-inch wheels which not only compromise ride quality but increase tax costs significantly. Whether the SQ5 with this TFSI petrol engine is here for the long haul, once a new TDI engine has been developed, only time and demand by customers will tell.

VERDICT

Overall it was a driving experience with the TFSI engine in the SQ5 to be savoured and remembered, but perhaps not one to convince me that in this day and age in real-use conditions the SQ5 TFSI is the best Q5 model for the majority of UK owners, given our future financial and business uncertainties and congested driving conditions. But how often, if you can afford it, does buying with your head rather than your heart take precedence?

For: Performance, technology, high specification, selectable driving and performance modes, kerb appeal, scarcity value.

Against: No new TDI turbodiesel engine option yet, expensive - especially if further options are added, huge running costs and larger 21-inch wheels increase tax liabilities.



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

New Audi SQ5 3.0 TFSI quattro 354 hp automatic SUV.

Price: £51,200 (£60,285 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 3.0 litre V6 TFSI turbocharged petrol, 354 hp, 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) of torque from 1,370 rpm, eight speed automatic, quattro 4WD with Sport differential.



Performance: 155 mph restricted top speed or 174 mph derestricted, 0-62 mph 5.4 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle with optional 21-inch wheels 33.2 mpg (28.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 195 g/km with 21-inch wheels, VED road tax First Year £1,200, then £140 Standard rate + £310 supplement for five years as its costs over £40, BiK company car tax 37%. With standard 20-inch wheels the figures are 34 mpg, CO2 189 g/km, VED £800 then £140 + £310 and BiK is 36%.

Insurance Group: 42E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,671 mm (15.32 ft), W 1,893 mm (6.21 ft), H 1,635 mm (5.36 ft), boot/load space 610 to 1,550 litres (21.54 to 54.74 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,400 kg (5,291 ft), five doors/five seats.