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Estate of the art? Audi's smart A6 Avant load carrier – Road Test

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The fifth generation Audi A6 Saloon and Avant estates are slowly coming to market. The 2.0 litre 40 four cylinder TDI and 3.0 50 V6 TDI turbodiesel (both with mild hybrid support) models with standard automatic transmissions were launched in September last year to the UK media and these met the new WLTP homologated fuel economy and CO2 requirements introduced that month.

Other engines are available to be ordered but deliveries have been delayed because of the



backlog in getting the WLTP approval due to the volume of engines to be tested. This delay for the complete A6 range and other models saw Audi's UK new car registrations fall by 17.8% in 2018. This is a significant implication for a premium brand that for years has been the leading German manufacturer with consecutive years of record sales ahead of BMW and Mercedes but now that position is reversed. That said there appears to be no shortage of UK customers placing orders for new Audis – they just have to wait a little longer for them to be delivered.

So initially we have had the new A6 with 40 TDI and 50 TDI engines with Sport and S-Line spec levels, with Saloons priced from £38,640 to £50,470 and Avant estates from £40,740 to £52,885. Looking at the Audi UK public website other variants are listed for ordering for future delivery. These are the Avant Allroad with 3.0 litre TDI 218, 272 and 320 hp diesel engine options, S6 Saloon and Avant quattro versions with a 4.0 litre TFSI 450 hp petrol unit and the RS6 Avant quattro with a 4.0 litre TFSI 560 hp petrol unit which tops out the range price list at £81,470.

As there is a predominance of company car customers for the new A6 models the 2.0 litre 40 TDI will be the most popular unit due to its lower tax implications. Saloons slightly outsell Avant estates but that is a moving situation because new customers, having enjoyed the space offered by current commonplace SUVs, are being seen to move to something more exclusive and now seem to favouring roomy estates this time around. Whatever the engine or body style Audi UK at the media launch said last year 16,000 A6's were sold in the UK. However it might be slightly less this year given the complications caused by WLTP and the overall drop in their new car sales.

At the media launch we featured the expected best-selling model – the A6 Saloon 40 S-Line with its 2.0 litre 204 hp TDI turbodiesel engine and seven speed auto gearbox and front wheel drive, priced at £42k. This longer test driving spell with the new A6 is for the Avant 50 TDI V6 286 hp quattro S-Line with the eight speed tiptronic auto gearbox, priced at £52,885 although packed with extra cost options the final showcase price was a huge £71,810.



Although the S-Line specification is comprehensive, just some of these 'extras' on our test vehicle included the £1,000 leather upholstered sports front seats, 20-inch alloy wheels at £950, the useful head-up display at £1,450, City Assist Pack at £1,375, 360-degree camera £700, dynamic all wheel steering at £1,950, the brilliant in all senses Matrix LED headlights with dynamic front and rear indicators at £600. There is also the nice to have adaptive air suspension at £2,050, panoramic sunroof at £1,750, 4-zone auto climate control at £825, the superb Bang & Olufsen sound system at £800 and the important £1,495 Technology Pack. This includes the MMI Navigation Plus system over the standard sat-nav system and adds a 10.1-inch full HD touchscreen and an 8.6-inch full HD touchscreen positioned below it, for controls such as the heating and ventilation system which is tricky to use whilst driving. Other driving support features include Google Earth navigation and enhanced points of interest guidance info with voice control, the Audi Virtual Cockpit with its 12.3-inch full colour digital screen in the instrument binnacle and Audi Phonebox with wireless charging. Also fitted was the £1,950 Tour Pack with adaptive cruise assist, camera traffic sign recognition, Audi Pre-Sense, High Beam Assist and Lane Departure Warning with emergency assist.



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Standard spec for the Avant S-Line level includes 19-inch alloys, lowered sports suspension, uprated exterior lighting, exterior styling with revised front and rear sports bumpers, side skirts, rear diffuser flanked by two aluminium exhaust tailpipes, roof edge spoiler, heated, adjustable and folding door mirrors with memory function, matt brushed aluminium trim inlays, perforated leather steering wheel, sports pedals and S logo illuminated door sills. Carried upwards from standard Sport spec level are items such as the 48-volt mild hybrid engine support system for the 50 TDI (12-volt for 40 TDI models), leather upholstery, heated front seats, 40/20/40 split-folding rear seats, boot space cargo rails, cargo net with clip-in points, a multi-function steering wheel with gear shift paddles, power operated tailgate and acoustic windscreen. Most of the interior design, layout, controls and spec are carried down



from the recently introduced Audi large A8 luxury saloon, including the impeccable build quality. The extra interior rear seat space and legroom of this latest generation A6 Avant also improves the long distance travelling comfort.



As far as exterior styling goes the new A6 Avant is very much an evolution of what has gone before with the previous generation. It looks like the A8 at the front, it has evolved to have a long wheelbase and at the rear the tailgate is steeply raked forward to increase the visual dynamism and wide rear haunches give it a wide rear end appearance. Load space has a 565 litre (19.95 cu.ft) boot space with the rear seat in place and 1,680 litres (59.33 cu.ft)



with the rear seat backs folded down. That isn't as big as its main rival the Mercedes E-Class estate. Other premium brand estate competitors include the BMW 5 Series Touring and Volvo V90 but all are outshone for space and price by the best value estate of the lot – the Skoda Superb.

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The 3.0 litre 50 V6 TDI turbodiesel engine provides 286 hp and a huge amount of torque of 620 Nm (457 lb.ft) with its 48-volt mild hybrid system, making it a really strong performer through the rev range. It is just such a strong and effortless performer with instant power when needed and very relaxed once cruising speed has been reached.



In the normal Drive position of the eight-speed tiptronic gearbox the response is good even



in Efficiency engine mode, but slip into the gear lever into the Sport position and the engine response is immediate and potentially too aggressive for most driving conditions – but as always with quattro traction the big estate always felt well planted. Perhaps it's not as agile in the handling department as the BMW 5 Series Touring but it is better for long-legged comfortable cruising at sustained high speeds. Fast travel on more winding country roads was always predictable and confidence-boosting thanks to the all wheel drive grip. The £1,950 optional Dynamic All Wheel Steering helped with preciseness at both low in-town speeds and open road cornering conditions. Ride comfort was first class but much of that was down to the £2,050 Adaptive Air Suspension option. This cushioned the ride most of the time from impacts from all but the worst of the potholes, despite the test car being fitted with the overly large 20-inch alloy wheels.

These larger wheels also increase the CO2 emission figure, up from 151 g/km to 155 g/km. This means First Year diesel rate road tax costs £830 before the £140 Standard rate is applied – but £310 a year for five years has to be added to that latter figure as the car costs over £40k. Company car drivers will pay 36% Benefit-in-Kind tax with these larger wheels, up 1% over the smaller standard wheels.

The official Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 47.9 mpg with 20-inch wheels, 48.7 mpg with smaller wheels. My week of test driving returned an average 38.7 mpg including all types of roads and conditions. But for two longer motorway and A-road journeys the figures were 48.3 and 50.1 mpg respectively, proof that larger capacity turbodiesel engines offer more potential for fuel economy at higher cruising speeds than 2.0 litre four-cylinder units which have to work harder.



VERDICT

Overall the new Audi A6 Avant is fine looking great all-rounder, a credit to the brand but it is costly if you delve into the options list.

For: Classy image, impeccable interior quality, more interior space, reasonable load carrying capacity, impressively refined, strong and responsive engine, a great long-legged comfortable and spacious fast cruiser.

Against: Too many of the must-have options should be standard-fit (such as the Virtual



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Cockpit), high-ish tax costs, ungenerous warranty.



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

New Audi A6 Avant estate, 50 TDI quattro 286 hp, S-Line tiptronic auto.

Price: £52,885 (£71,810 as tested).

Engine/transmission: 3.0 litre, V6 TDI twin-turbo diesel with 48-volt mild hybrid



support, 286 hp, 620Nm (457 lb.ft) of torque from 2,250 rpm, eight speed tiptronic auto with quattro 4WD.

Performance: 155 mph (restricted), 0-62 mph 5.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 47.9 mpg (38.7 mpg overall on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 155 g/km; VED diesel rate First Year road tax £830 then £140 Standard rate + £310 annually for five years as it costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 36% (all mpg/CO2 figs based on optional 20-inch wheels).

Insurance Group: 42E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,939mm (16.20 ft), W 1,886 mm (6.19 ft), H 1,467 mm (4.81 ft), wheelbase 2,924 mm (9.59 ft), boot/load space 565 to 1,680 litres (19.95 to 59.33 lb.ft) , braked towing weight 2,000 kg (4,409 lb), five doors/five seats.