

Audi A3 Sportback 5dr 35TFSI S tronic MHEV – Road Test

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elsWithinWales) writes...

Twenty-nine years ago the first Audi A3 established the premium compact class and today the fourth generation sets a high standard which rivals really struggle to match.



From that initial model in 1996, the A3 series has evolved into a comprehensive range of saloons and semi-estates or coupés with individual emphasis on sophistication or sportiness to satisfy the wide tastes of drivers and owners.

The latest A3 Sportback comes with five-doors and a range of engines including mild hybrid we tested along with manual or automatic transmission. It has been joined by a PHEV version in the range a few months ago with a pure electric range of 88 miles.

Outwardly the latest series is distinguished by its selectable daytime running lights and inside there is more standard equipment and a finish with new materials to update the cabin.

They are based on three trim levels, Sport, S Line and Black. Plus, the sole Vorsprung halo model.

Audi has gradually expanded the engine range from introduction of the latest generation so there are now 116 PS, 150 PS, 204 PS and 333 PS versions, with the most powerful fitted with quattro all-wheel-drive and spanning a price range of about £30,100 to £53,000.

The newcomer has incorporated many features and elements from its larger stablemates and put them into a more compact package with the result there is a lot to touch and feel.

As a result, doors shut with a satisfying muted thud and everything looks put together with fine attention to fit and finish and it moves without a rattle or shimmer over any surface.

Our mid-range 150 PS engine with its mild-hybrid electrical assistance is a good performer with reasonably quick acceleration from rest, a refined and strong mid-range pull when overtaking and a thoroughly relaxed long-legged gait on main roads, so its fuel consumption was quite acceptable without having to try and be economical.



Engine noise when it came as revs rose was modest and it was a pleasant note, better than the road rumbles and occasional bump-thump from the tyres or suspension.

Generally, the ride was good for a German semi-estate assisted by some really comfortable seating include deep bolsters in the front pair and extendable knee supports. The rear seats were flatter and not as supporting but still good.

However, legroom was tight behind the front seats, particularly if they were set for a taller driver or passenger who enjoyed a good range of adjustment on theirs.



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The compact A3 Sportback felt very agile in town or country, could be precisely placed when parking or pressing on through bends and it gripped tarmac with tenacity.

For the driver, the car felt it was built around them with everything angled towards them, every control whether major or minor was exactly where you'd expect it to be and all operated with a satisfying firmness.

The gearchanges were slick and smooth whether going up or down the transmission and playing with the available modes to maximise economy or excitement, the brakes were effortlessly strong and the steering feedback was intuitive and inviting.

The infotainment centre was packed with features and had a large display which could also be shown directly in front of the driver if desired which was particularly handy when it came to navigation so you only glanced down a bit to see upcoming turns rather than take eyes off the road ahead for longer to look left at a central display.

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Heating and ventilation was comprehensive, with good output, direction and temperature control, backed up by heated rear window and door mirrors.

Oddments space was fairly good if a bit limited in the back, but the bootspace was generous and quickly expanded if necessary and revealed a hidden under-floor compartment as well.



Access to the luggage area was good and it was easy to slip into or out of the cabin.

Visibility was good for a Sportback design with just some loss of sight over the shoulder when pulling out into traffic or reversing, but the lights were really bright, washers and wipers effective as well.

VERDICT

This A3 felt like a much bigger executive car than it was.

For: Refined interior, precise handling, good roadholding, very well equipped.

Against: Limited rear leg and headroom, some road rumbles and modest engine noise.



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Fact file

Model: Audi A3 Sportback 35TFSi MHEV

Price: £34,315

Mechanical: 150 PS 1.5 litre 4 cyl petrol hybrid, 7 speed auto



Max speed: 140 mph

0 - 60 mph: 8.1 secs

CO2 emissions: 127 g/km

Insurance group: 20

Bik rating: 12%, £210FY, £180SR

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.36 m (14.30 ft), W 1.99 m (6.53 ft), H 1.47 m (4.82 ft)

Bootpace: 380 to 1,200 litres (13.42 to 42.38 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,325 kg (2,921 lb)