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Audi Q8 – First Impressions

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New Audi Q8 joins the booming SUV market...

By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Britain's booming SUV market has yet another new player. The Audi Q8 raises the game for the company as the new flagship in its sporting range and it's also a real challenger to rivals from Range Rover, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Maserati, as well as Bentley.

The new five-seater Q8 has a coupé styled five-door body using quattro drive and a 48v mild-hybrid 286 hp 3.0TDi turbodiesel engine and eight-speed Tiptronic automatic. Other powertrains will follow.



The S-Line model opening the range costs from £65,040 while for £18,000 more you can buy the Vorsprung version in the near future; both are built in Audi's Bratislava plant.

Standard equipment on the S-Line launch model includes 21-inch wheels, adaptive air-sport suspension, drive select modes and assistance systems, advanced LED beams, privacy glass, powered tailgate, with highly sophisticated touch-screen sat-nav and infotainment with virtual cockpit.

The Vorsprung is the top model coming after the launch of this S-Line version, and it gains 22-inch wheels, all-wheel steering, all-round crash mitigation systems, very large sunroof and trim enhancements, powered door closing, full heated seating, extended leather trim and even a low-level autonomous driving system to maximise economy.

Owners can select Tour, City Assist and Trailer Packs to personalise their model.

The new Q8 is shorter but wider than the sister Q7 model but it has a nominal 605-litres (21.37 cu.ft) rising to 1,755 litres (61.98 cu.ft) of luggage space and with its extensive use of aluminium weighs 2,145 kg (4,729 lb).

The highly sophisticated 3.0TDI V6 turbodiesel engine is entitled Q8 50 in Audi language and with the 48v mild-hybrid battery pack creates 286 hp with 600 Nm (443 lb.ft) of torque, giving a 0-62mph time of 6.3 seconds and a maximum speed of 144 mph. A Q8 45 TDI 231 hp V6 version will come next year alongside a Q8 55 TFSI with 340 hp 3.0 V6 petrol engine.



The familiar Audi quattro powertrain delivers a normal 40:60 torque split but this changes as detected by sensors or the driver's actions. The highly sophisticated recharging system ensures the battery is never exhausted but utilises the best conditions to cut diesel emissions in urban areas and run on electric power only at times, particularly cruising on motorways.

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Audi Q8 product manager Martin Baker said the arrival of the new model builds on the success of the stable-mate Q7 which went to 6,366 UK drivers last year.

"We believe most of the Q8 sales will come from conquest business and other brands which do not show such strong residual values as Audi has done in this premium sector," he said.



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Last year, Audi UK saw its market share rise to 6.9% and it is neck and neck with BMW, who are both just behind Mercedes-Benz and with the Q8 its CAP Gold Book predicted residual value for the anticipated best selling 50 TDI S line will be 46.7% over the next three years.

That is just behind the sector setting 49.5% of the Range Rover Sport 3.0 SDV6 HSE but some way ahead of the Maserati Levante Diesel Gransport, Mercedes-Benz GLE Coupé 350d 4Matic AMG Line Edition and BMW X6 xDrive 3.0d M Sport. Predicted running costs pence-



per-mile are under those of the BMW and Mercedes-Benz models and beaten only by the Range Rover Sport.

Martin Baker said Audi UK expected the forthcoming 231 hp diesel to take just 5% of Q8 registrations, the 340 hp petrol double that percentage while the launch-engine 286 hp diesel will capture 85% of orders and most will be specified with about £8,000 to £10,000 worth of options which will help keep up residual values close to half of original cost over three years.

“There is still a good market for diesel in the high mileage sector and where torque is needed for towing horseboxes or trailers of some sort,” he added.

While the S line will be the main seller, Audi UK has seen a larger number than anticipated for the £18,000 dearer Vorsprung, which adds about £20,000 of extra equipment if individually specified.

In 2017, Audi sold 1.87 million vehicles globally and in the UK levelled at 174,982 cars reaching 6.9%, its highest penetration.

In the first six months of 2018, Audi UK recorded 102,723 sales a 0.11% rise over the first half of 2017 and it's on target to end the year about the same as 2017.

Audi is well into a €24B new model programme until the end of 2019 and which will include introduction of the electric model e-tron early next year.

First impressions



Audi designers really have done a good job of apparently shrinking the new model when viewed alongside its stablemate larger Q7 and without detracting from its on-road presence.

Lengthening the wheelbase while shortening overall size has resulted in a larger passenger compartment, particularly for the three rear-seat passengers and there's still plenty of luggage space.



Inside there is the familiar eye-catching quality of trim and fit and all the major controls readily fall to hand and foot while the very latest touch screen and split-screen technology presents itself. While I am not a fan of having so much technology crammed into the displays they gave a clear representation of information.

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Our S Line 286 hp hybrid diesel packed a punch and delivered it smoothly over a wide power range with imperceptible changes through the eight-speed transmission. There are five drive-mode settings to optimise performance for conditions and they instantly change when the driver selects a setting.



The quiet and smooth powertrain only made itself heard under hard acceleration but there was constant muted road noise despite the fitting of double-glazed windows on the test car, which will be options in due course.

Our test route took in a number of narrow country lanes and village streets and this brought home the fact the Q8 is a smidgen under 2 metres (6.56 ft) wide so needs care when passing or parking. Its sensors and cameras, some of which are expensive options, really cover the blindspots but without them you need to be particularly vigilant. Having said that, it's more maneuverable than the bigger Q7.

Some of that added handling improvement comes from four-wheel-steering, optional on S line and standard on Vorsprung versions, which cuts the turning circle by a metre (3.28 ft) while sharpening steering response through fast bends.

Overall during the 80 miles test route we managed to achieve 33 mpg, some way off the new WLTP Combined Cycle indicated 41.5 mpg, but fairly representative of mixed roads and traffic.

VERDICT

Audi Q8 packs in the sophistication of the Audi brand and delivers a very agile SUV for those needing just five seats.

For: Roomy, refined, smooth powertrain, economical, potentially very strong residual values.

Against: Some road noise, visibility blindspots without sensors & cameras, expensive options, size may pose problems, ungenerous warranty.



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

Audi Q8 50 S-Line. (Expected best selling model).

Price: £65,040.

Engine/transmission: 286 hp, 600 Nm (443 lb.ft) of torque, 3.0 litre V6 TDI mild-hybrid, eight speed automatic with quattro AWD.



Performance: 152 mph, 0-62 mph 6.3 seconds, WLTP Combined Cycle 41.5 mpg (on test 33 mpg).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 emissions 178 g/km, VED diesel First Year rate £1,240 then £140 Standard rate + £310 supplement for five years as it costs over £40k, BiK company car tax rating 37%.

Insurance Group: 47E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions: L 4.99 m (16.37 ft), W 1.96 m (6.43 ft), H 1.71 m (5.61 ft), wheelbase 2,994 mm (9.82 ft), kerb weight 2,145 kg (4,729 lb), boot/load space 605 - 1,755 litres (21.37 - 61.98 cu.ft), five doors/five seats.