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Audi RS4 Avant

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Author: Tom Scanlan

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by Tom Scanlan

What is the point in a car like this, with a potential of 174 mph?

I put that very question to the car's design chief in Germany. His answer would never convince the green lobby, but he made the point at the end that, although this car would not save the world neither would it harm it.

It is indeed a clever, if not superlative, piece of engineering.

Under the bonnet is the absolutely fabulous 4.2-litre FSI V8 engine storming out 444 bhp. The gearbox is Audi's 7-speed S tronic working through twin clutches. The transmission is Quattro all wheel drive, with the latest development in getting torque automatically to the



right end of the car and, through the sports differential, to the appropriate wheel - instead of braking a wheel, more power is fed to the other wheel.

You ride on a sports suspension that that nicely handles a variety of surfaces; certainly, there is none of the bone-testing hardness that manufacturers seemed for a long while to think its drivers wanted in a 'performance' car. As an option, an even more sophisticated sports suspension can be ordered.

Care needs to be taken in such a powerful car. Drive gently to start with, to get the feel of things; the RS4 Avant proves as docile and driver-friendly as can be.

After a while, and given an open road, you can start to push a bit. The car remains totally driver-friendly. You begin to realise just what it might be capable of, as twists and bends might just as well not exist - the car is completely at ease and there's not a trace of roll or pitch or yaw. There's a marvellous noise, too. The high-revving V8 is just sensational. You can't help but grin... it's very naughty, but very nice! In fact, it's addictive: You start to look for every opportunity to hit the 8,500 revs red line. On unrestricted German Autobahns, the car proved to have phenomenal acceleration even from speeds well over 100 mph. The gear changes are brilliantly quick (0.2 seconds, claims Audi, because, with the twin clutch system, the next gear is always ready and waiting). You can paddle them, use the lever or just let the car do it all for you. Going down the gearbox, you also get a lovely blip on the throttle.

The brakes are beautifully smooth and progressively powerful. Maximum push on the pedal from high speed is almost as much fun as the extraordinary acceleration from zero to 62mph in just 4.7 seconds.

All of Audi's digital technology is on board, including Drive Select that allows you a choice of performance configurations.

Being an Avant, there is the practicality of the estate rear end. The boot is of a reasonable size and is fitted out very nicely as is the always the case with Audi. So there is quality



carpet, flexible floor space and compartments, hooks and so on. For a full complement of four in the car, the space isn't huge; if there are only two of you in the car, that's no great problem, easy as it is to lower one or both of the rear seat backs.

The RS4 Avant's standard seats are the RS4 Super Sports, while front buckets for even more support are available as an option.

The steering wheel is flat-bottomed and you grip onto perforated leather. Ready to go!

So, how much for all of this?

The starting price for the RS4 Avant is £54,925, but another ten or twenty thousand can easily be added in options. It won't be cheap to run either; although a combined cycle fuel consumption figure of 26.4 mpg and CO2 emissions at 249 g/km are quite commendable given the stunning performance, you will certainly be paying for your fun.