Audi SQ5 TDi Plus 3.0 quattro Tiptronic Road Test

Published: September 30, 2016

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/audi-sq5-tdi-road-test/

Audi's 'Go Faster' SQ5 reviewed by Chris Adamson.

(All words and photos by Chris).

For my money the Q5 model is the best off-roader that Audi has made so far, thanks to a combination of performance and functionality.

This year, the flagship SQ5 version has been given an extra boost with the installation of a new 90 degree, 3 litre, bi-turbo V6 diesel heart that promises more power, more torque and more equipment than its 'standard' counterpart.

Previously criticised for being rather bland in appearance, the latest Q5 in the S grade trim now looks a little more aggressive (although it still lacks a degree of individuality), as well as piling on more comfort features.

The go-faster Plus version (as tested here) can be identified by the five twin-spoke 21 inch cast aluminium wheels in titanium finish, and an extended black gloss pack that contains fittings such as the exterior mirror housings, door handle tops, roof edge spoiler and rear diffuser. Further identifiers include the four paired exhaust pipes, rear privacy glass and a powered tailgate.

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In a fiercely contested premium sector, the SQ5 holds it own against the opposition when it comes to comfort items, such as the Nappa leather upholstery with diamond stitching, which is standard fare, along with an MMI navigation plus satellite guidance system and a top-of-the range Audi Music Interface.

All this does come at a price however; you are going to have to think £52,000 before you can take away the keys and if you added in any of the options (and most owners are going to be tempted) this can quickly take a fully loaded version closer to £60,000.

From a long list you can select from things such as electric seats (£450), panoramic roof (£21,125), running boards (£735), parking sensors (£340), adaptive lighting (£330) and a Bang and Olufsen sound system (£535).

Being sporty doesn’t mean that the SQ5 isn’t practical as well, as demonstrated by the generous, easy access, 540 litre (19 cu.ft) luggage compartment (with useful load securing features) that positively balloons to 1,560 litres (55 cu.ft) with the sliding rear seats folded down.

On the Road

At the heart of the latest SQ5 is that new turbocharged diesel engine, a quiet and smooth operator that features direct injection, a two stage turbocharger with intercooler, swirl and tangential intake ports and central swirl flap.

With 340 PS on tap, this is 14 PS more than before and, as result, Audi claims it will get to 62 mph in 5.1 seconds – which would out-gun many a modern sportscar.

I didn’t time my run past the 60 mph indicator (on the motorway of course) but five seconds

didn’t seem out of the question as, for a bulky vehicle, the SQ5 can certainly lift up its skirts and hustle along.

Power is controlled, in easy doses of acceleration, by an eight-speed tiptronic automatic transmission which, for ease of use, can be controlled by paddle shifts (as well as a standard gear selector) and there is a sport setting if the standard mode isn’t enough.

Audi promises improved fuel economy; the ‘official’ average figure tops 42 mpg which means that you get more miles for your bang. The only downside is that a big diesel lump like this isn’t going to be the cleanest vehicle out there, as demonstrated by the quoted 174 g/Km emissions.

The SQ5 never was a slouch and the latest power unit ensures that it lives up to that reputation but this has to be qualified against an observation that it is, perhaps, not as dynamic as some of its rivals in the handling stakes.

The handling, while competent, lacks a degree of driver feedback and the chassis doesn’t really give a sensation of performance. However, this could just be a factor of the chassis and drive line-up being so accomplished that it takes the harshness out of everything.

Although it’s hard to imagine this vehicle ever venturing off the tarmac, there is enough traction and torque, a whopping 700 Nm (516.3 lb.ft) up 50 Nm (37 lb.ft) on the previous unit) being delivered from a lowly 1,500 rpm, to get you through most on and off-road situations.

It also has the benefit of Audi’s pioneering quattro four-wheel drive system which, in this case, and a first on the Q5, includes a sports differential at the rear axle which actively distributes the drive between the wheels

Verdict

The Q5 was already a highly capable and well-controlled vehicle that responded to the

needs of a wide range of drivers.

With the new power house it turns it into a more assured driver's machine, one that isn't just capable of carrying the family and all their assorted luggage but one that does it in style and at pace without breaking the bank.

Wheels-Alive Tech Spec in Brief:

Vehicle: Audi SQ5 TDI Plus 3.0 Quattro Tiptronic.

Engine: 2967cc V6 TDi.

Transmission: Eight-speed Tiptronic.

Power: 340 PS @ 4,100 rpm.

Torque: 700 Nm (516.3 lb.ft) @ 1,500 rpm.

Performance:

0-62mph: 5.1 seconds.

Top Speed: 155 mph (limited).

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 36.2 mpg.

Extra-Urban: 47.0 mpg.

Combined: 42.8 mpg.

CO2 Emissions: 174 g/km.

Price (On the Road), from: £51,850 (£58,065 as tested).