Audi’s New A4 Road Test

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Keith Ward test drive’s Audi’s latest A4…

In 2015 Audi achieved best ever worldwide sales of 1,803,250 cars, a 3.6 per cent improvement over 2014. Sales in the UK at 166,709 increased by five per cent, and are currently (at May 2016) running a further five per cent up.

Having already expanded spectacularly its range of models over the last decade, the German four-ring brand is embarked upon a further 24 billion-euro programme taking it to 2019.

The all-new A4, lighter and sleeker and claiming to be 21 per cent more fuel efficient than before, is priced from just under £26,000 to over £40,000. A 54-strong range offers a choice of saloon or Avant estate bodies in three grades of trim, two petrol and four diesel engines outputting 150 to 272 PS, manual or auto gearboxes and, at the upper end, quattro 4WD.

The saloon is already garlanded as What Car? Magazine's Car of the Year for 2016. It features a comfortable cabin with good head and leg room, a good-sized lidded boot in traditional saloon style, but with rear seatbacks which can be folded down to double luggage capacity.

We drove the 2.0 TDI powered by a 150 PS four-cylinder diesel through a seven-speed S-tronic automatic box. Top S-line trim gave it sports suspension, larger 18-inch alloys, LED headlights and rear lights plus “dynamic rear indicators”, meaning a touch of ‘Las Vegas’ in the sweeping action in the intended turn direction.

The A4 catalogue is awash with driving aids and (buzz word warning) connectivity goodies. A series of options including packs for Driving Assistance (£1,250) and Technology (£1,450) rapidly raised the price of our car from its starter-listing of £32,445 to near-£40,000. Pitched by Audi against premium brands in BMW, Jaguar and Mercedes, the A4 is no cheapskate compact saloon and emulates their “add options to your basket” practice.Fitted as a £450 option was the Audi “Virtual Cockpit”, already seen in the TT and R8 sports cars. It replaces the analogue dials in the instrument binnacle behind the steering wheel with a panoramic 12.3-inch, vividly coloured digital display of such as a 3D navigation map and connections to all the usual info services. It’s clever, but for some it may be too much information, for others a distraction.What I missed was a relatively common rear view camera – itself a £450 option and only available if you first lash out £395 on “parking system plus” giving you merely guidelines.

On the road, our A4 handled with pleasurable verve and assurance on twisting roads along the Welsh borders, through towns that twisted the tongue. The re-worked seven-speed S-tronic twin-clutch automatic remained unruffled in press-on motoring, choosing without fuss

and nary a tremor the appropriate cog.

Both it and the eight-speed Tiptronic transmission exclusive to the flagship 3.0 V6 TDI quattro now incorporate a fuel-saving freewheel function.

On motorways, our 2.0 TDI pulled a relaxed 1,500 revs in top seventh at 70 mph. All no doubt contributing to impressive fuel economy of over 56 mpg in a mixed bag of journeys in seven days.

Next up: This summer an A4 Allroad with first appearance of Audi's new fuel-saving, CO2-reducing quattro system.

WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:
Audi A4 2.0 TDI S line Saloon; 4-doors; 5 seats.

Engine: Diesel; 4-cyl; 1,968cc.

Transmission: 7-speed automatic S-tronic.

Power: 150 PS @ 3,250-4,200 rpm.

Torque: 320 Nm (236 lb.ft) @ 1500-3,250 rpm.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 8.7 sec.

Top speed: 136 mph.

Dimensions: Length 4,726 mm (15.51 ft); boot 480 litres (16.95 cu.ft); wt 1,465 kg (3,230 lb).

Fuel consumption: On test 56.7 mpg; official Combined 67.3 mpg; tank 40 litres (8.80 gallons).

Emissions and taxation: 109 g/km; tax band B; VED Nil then £20; BIK 19%.

Insurance Group: 23E.

Price: £32,445; as tested with options £39,520.

Rivals: BMW 3-series, Jaguar XE, Mercedes C-Class.