Latest Audi A3 Models Arrive – News and First Impressions

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Audi Gives Their A3 Family a Mid-life Refresh – News and Views.

Summed up by David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

The Audi A3 family of three door Hatchbacks, five door Sportback, four door Saloon and the

two door Cabriolet soft-top have received a mid-life refresh. These refreshed and ready to go third generation A3s adopt the brand's latest styling changes, have new or improved engines, increased standard equipment levels and the latest driving support and infotainment systems. Deliveries to UK customers start now.

The A3 family is Audi's best selling range in the UK with 47,653 of them finding UK buyers last year. Around 60% of those sales were accounted for by the five door Sportback versions. Across the A3 range UK retail customers account for 45% of sales and 55% are fleet and business user-choosers customers. But Cabriolet and the three door Hatchback versions have a bias in sales towards retail customers.

Audi sees competitor premium brand models as the BMW 1 and 2 Series, Mercedes A-Class and CLA and the Volvo V40. Of course Audi's parent company Volkswagen Group brands of VW, SEAT and Skoda all have competitor models such as the Golf, Leon and Octavia which use the same MQB platform and drivetrains.

Prices for the revised A3 range have risen by an average £500 across the large line-up of 127 model combinations but Audi point out that sum is more than justified because of the added extra equipment and technology. Prices start at £19,365 for the 1.0 litre petrol three door Hatchback, £19,985 for the 1.0 litre five door Sportback, £24,235 for the 1.4 litre petrol four door Saloon and £26,875 for the similarly powered Cabriolet.

The levels of specification choices are SE expected to be the choice of 20% of customers, SE Technik around 10% of sales with Sport and S line each taking 35% of sales. The new range is in its infancy with S, RS quattro hard-core sports versions and the e-tron Sportback plug-in petrol/electric hybrid variant joining the line-up this year with S versions arriving first.

There is the choice of six mainstream engines, three petrol and three diesels with power outputs from 110 hp ranging up to 190 hp. The most notable changes include for the first time a three cylinder 1.0 litre TFSI turbo petrol engine joining the line-up as an entry level offering and this has a power output of 110 hp. This engine replaces the 1.2 TFSI 95 hp four

cylinder petrol engine.

A new 2.0 litre TFSI turbo petrol engine generating 190 hp has been added for mid-range models and quattro all-wheel-drive is also available with this engine.

At the top of the range the niche version S3 models have been given an extra 10 hp and 20 Nm (15 lb.ft) more torque, with the 2.0 litre TFSI petrol unit which now produces 310 hp and 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque. The 2.0 litre TFSI engines are joined by a newly developed seven-speed S tronic twin-clutch automatic transmission option which replaces the six-speed dual clutch system.

For customers who require diesel power there is the 1.6 TDI with 110 hp and the 2.0 litre TDI engine available with two states of tune – 150 hp and 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) or 184 hp and 380 Nm (280 lb.ft) of torque.

The single most popular revised A3 model, driven by fleet sales, will be the five door Sportback 1.6 TDI 110 hp manual with S line specification priced at £25,935. Although the lower SE spec version, priced at £22,235, has CO2 emissions of 99 g/km so Benefit-in-Kind tax is 19%, the S line with 18-inch wheels has a CO2 figure of 108 g/km so BIK is 21%. The Combined Cycle fuel economy is 74.3 mpg for the SE and 68.9 mpg for the S line.

Speaking at the UK media launch for the revised range, Jon Zammett, Head of Press and PR said, “The A3 is a really important car for us, accounting for over 47,000 of our annual 166,709 UK sales last year, and we expect the demand to grow. Regarding Brexit we don’t know at this stage what the implications might be. But we are a global company so we take all this in our stride and as the demand for Audi sales is so strong in the UK we will see the flow of our products from Germany continue in the future.”

The revised versions of the third generation family of A3 models has strong sharper styling lines, including the latest Audi family grille, plus a new front apron making the car look wider although the dimensions are the same as before. There is a new headlight shape, a new range of alloy wheels and new choice of body colours. Xenon headlights with LED

daytime running lights are standard across the range, as is cruise control, automatic lights and wipers, smartphone integration and a three spoke multifunction steering wheel. Options include Matrix LED headlights and Audi's highly rated Virtual Cockpit digital instrumentation – part of the £1,395 Technology Pack available on Sport and S line models only. The Pack also includes a 12.3-inch larger Navigation Plus infotainment system, advanced on-line functions and wireless Smartphone charging. As standard the A3 has a 6.5-inch colour screen and MMI infotainment system with simplified functions and Drive Select with various driving modes, from Economy through to Individual.



When it comes to choosing which body style to go for, the five door Sportback which

combines the flexibility of a hatchback with that of an estate is by far the most popular. The three door Hatchback scores because of its lower prices and is most likely to be the second car in a family, the Saloon is more grown up and business-like, shedding the do-it-all Hatchback image, and the two door Cabriolet is a niche model with clean lines and a fabric roof which takes 18 seconds to raise and the same time to fold at speeds up to 31 mph. When folded down out of sight it leaves a clean waistline and looks very classy.

Inside the latest A3 continues with Audi's classy high quality design with dense soft-touch materials, well placed controls, new style round air vents and a new multifunction steering wheel. The seats are comfortable and supportive and the rear seats are more suitable for two adults rather than three.





Driven...

At the media launch, as the new 1.0 litre, three cylinder TFSI turbo petrol engine models were yet to arrive in the UK, I opted to drive the best-selling five door Sportback version with the best-selling S line specification. But again unfortunately the most popular 1.6 litre TDI 110 hp turbodiesel engine hadn't arrived with this body style so instead, as diesel engines overall will be the most popular, I opted for the 2.0 litre, TDI 150 hp turbodiesel unit with its six-speed transmission. This model costs £27,285, which is £1,350 more expensive than the 1.6 litre TDI unit. This engine is well known and used throughout the VW Group of brands.

With 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm this unit is strong and very responsive but

the fifth and six gear ratios are long-legged to provided good fuel economy and low CO2 emissions. This meant on A roads around the Worcestershire and Herefordshire countryside plentiful use was made of the six speed gearbox to keep the unit in its most responsive area of the powerband. Top speed is 135 mph with zero to 62 mph taking a brisk 8.6 seconds. Officially this unit will return 65.7 mpg with the S line 18-inch wheels in the Combined Cycle but during my test drive the real-life figure was well short of that at 49.2 mpg and that was with relatively sedate driving due to the heavy traffic and pouring rain. With CO2 emissions of 109 g/km, VED road tax is only £0 for the First Year rate and then £20 for Year Two onwards. Company car drivers will pay 21% Benefit-in-Kind tax.

The handling balance of the Sportback is impeccable with sharp steering and plenty of grip even on wet roads. With the 18-inch standard wheels of the S line specification the ride is on the firm side with more than desirable road noise intrusion but using the Comfort setting in the Drive Select function the ride comfort improved without any noticeable loss in handling performance.

As an alternative, especially for retail customers, can I recommend considering the 1.4 litre, TFSI on-demand four cylinder turbocharged petrol engine. This produces the same 150 hp as the 2.0 litre diesel with 250 Nm (184 lb.ft) of torque from a lower 1,500rpm. This for me is a real gem of an engine; it is refined, smooth yet very responsive and much quieter. It provides a top speed of 136 mph and zero to 62mph takes 8.2 seconds so it’s better than the 2.0 litre TDI diesel unit. The Official Combined Cycle fuel economy is 58.9 mpg with the S line 18-inch wheels with CO2 emissions of 112 g/km with the manual gearbox. That means road tax is £0 rising to £30 and company car drivers will pay less in tax at 19%. Insurance is cheaper as well rated as Band 21E instead of 23E for the 2.0 litre diesel although the 1.6 diesel is lower at 17E.

Not only is the 1.4 TFSI nicer to drive, but also it costs less at £25,835 – which is cheaper than either the 1.6 litre TDI or the 2.0 litre TDI engines. The real-life fuel economy was good as well at 42.6 mpg during my test drive over the same route as the 2.0-litre TDI.



VERDICT

The revised Audi A3 might be pricier than its most of its rivals but class will tell hence its past popularity and the latest versions do not disappoint.

For: Smart new exterior styling, classier interior, higher specification, wide range of engine and model options, class leading residual values.

Against: Diesel engines are not as refined as the latest TFSI petrol units, pricier than most

of its rivals, ignore opting for the larger wheel options which firm-up the ride, reduce the fuel economy and raise CO2 emissions.



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

Audi A3 Sportback 2.0 litre TDI manual, S line. (Best selling body style and equipment level).

Engine: 2.0litre, 4-cylinder, turbodiesel, 150hp, 340 Nm (251 lb.ft) of torque from 1,750 rpm. Transmission: Six speed manual, front wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62mph: 8.6 seconds.

Top speed: 135mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 65.7 mpg, (49.2 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 109 g/km, VED road tax £0/£20, BIK company car tax 21%. Insurance Group: 23E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,313 mm (14.15 ft), W 1,785 mm (5.86 ft), H 1,426 mm (4.68 ft), boot/load space 380 to 1,220 litres (13.42 to 43.08 cu.ft), 5 doors/5 seats.

Price: £27,285.