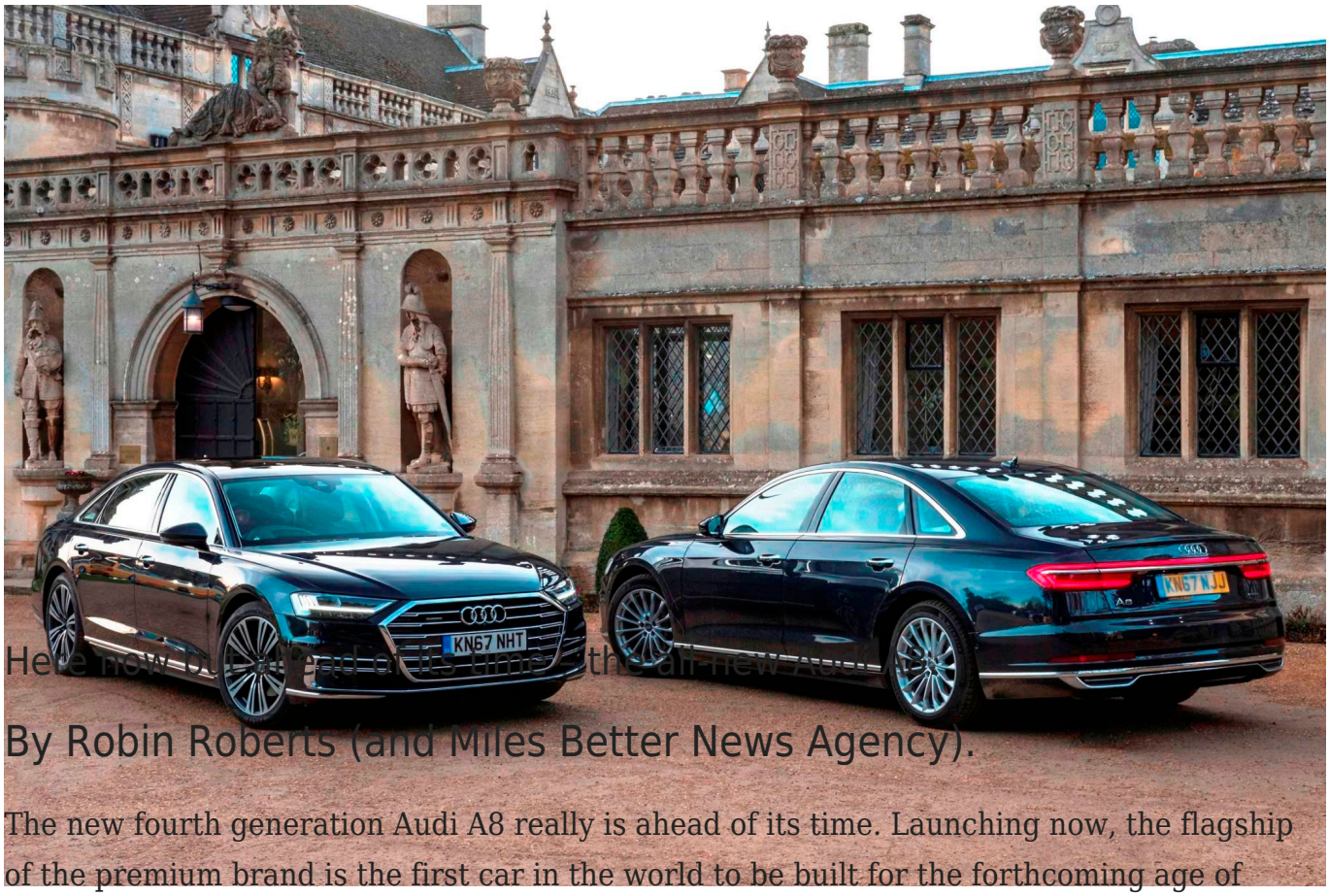
New Audi A8 – First Impressions

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Author: Robin Roberts

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Here now but ahead of its time, the all-new Audi A8

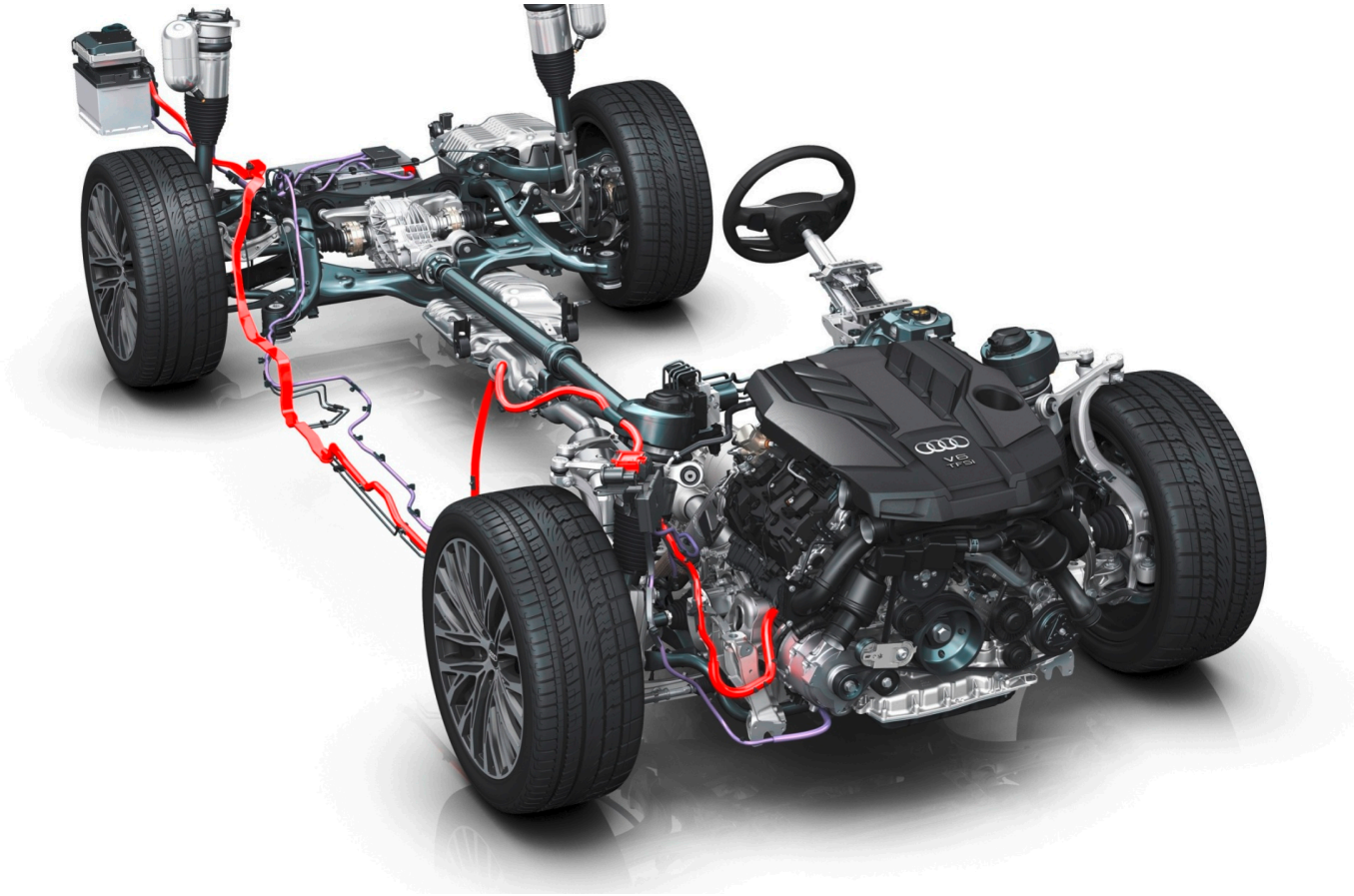
By Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

The new fourth generation Audi A8 really is ahead of its time. Launching now, the flagship of the premium brand is the first car in the world to be built for the forthcoming age of autonomous vehicles which don't require driver interaction in traffic at up to close to 40 mph, the so-called "Level 3" or "eyes off" category.

As legislation changes to allow the Level 3 to be 'turned-on', beginning in America but gradually being rolled out through Europe and the UK, it comes with traffic jam pilot, parking pilot and remote garage pilot, which means it looks after itself.



Prices for the four model A8 range, available in standard or 13 cms (5.1 in) longer wheelbase forms, run from £69,100 to just under £75,000 depending on whether they are powered by the 3.0 litre V6 286 hp turbodiesel or the 340 hp 3.0 litre V6 turbo petrol engines, both boosted by a 48v mild-hybrid electric motor and all use an eight-speed automatic transmission with quattro all-wheel-drive.



That part-electric 48v drivetrain indicates the future of Audi models but a fully electric version is also in the pipeline. It will be an intense period for Audi with 21 new models scheduled over 24 months and its average model will be just 3.3 years old, putting it ahead of rivals by a comfortable margin.

Demand is outstripping production capabilities which mean it can maintain strong new prices and used values are also kept up, delighting customers. About 1,200 A8s were registered in the UK last year and Audi is confident it can match that figure in 2018.

Audis see an approximate 50/ 50 split for the A8 between fleet and retail buyers, but the forthcoming A8 e-tron is expected to alter this towards company purchases, and its arrival could also affect the predominantly stronger diesel sales of the models. Standard wheelbase models are historically ordered by 70% of UK customers.

While the exterior changes may not be so evident, it is inside that the new A8 is eye-catching thanks to flat-screen ‘touch and voice’ technology on the central console and fascia, doing away with manual switches and which build on the virtual cockpit active driver screens ahead of the steering wheel, which we have seen in other models.

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Those who order the long wheelbase model not only get five-inches (about 13 cm) extra legroom in an already big cabin but they get a bit more headroom as well, heated seats, four-zone automatic air conditioning, a 5.7-inch OLED tablet to control settings including window blinds and a 230v socket as well as additional USB ports.

First impressions



We were able to evaluate both standard and long wheelbase 286 hp 3.0 litre V6 turbodiesel models and apart from appreciating the added sophistication of the interior and truly massive room in the stretched version, their performance was head-turning.

Weighing in at 1,975 kg (4,354 lb) for the standard wheelbase model, their 0–60mph time was under 6.0 seconds with a restricted top speed of 155 mph, but we also saw up to 45 mpg and down to 27 mpg over a mixture of roads, some way off the official combined figure of 48.7 mpg.

Even in standard wheelbase form the normal suspension smoothed out the worst road surfaces without bumps being felt, while the longer version seemed to truly glide along.

There is an active magnetic fluid suspension so the driver can select progressively firmer damping and while it did feel stiffer the ride quality was still remarkably good.

The new Audi A8 is a big car overall but the steering made it easy to park and manoeuvre in traffic, and the brakes were mighty in application with just modest pedal pressure. Visibility was excellent thanks to the low waistline and back-up sensors and the boot would be a chauffeur's delight with 505 litres (17.83 cu.ft) available, even if it's a long reach to the bulkhead.

VERDICT

With added refinements, building on established qualities, and outstanding performance, there seems little chance of demand for the A8 diminishing as the future approaches.

For: Strong powertrain with turbodiesel engine and electric motor, performance, comfort, very roomy, quiet, sophisticated and stylish interior, beautifully built.

Against: High ownership costs, big car which takes up a lot of road and parking space, expensive accessories, average warranty.



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

Audi A8 50 TDI automatic, Quattro, standard wheelbase saloon.

Price: £69,100 on-the-road.

Engine/transmission: 3.0 litre, V6, turbodiesel, 286 hp, 600 Nm (443 lb.ft) of torque from 1,250 rpm, with hybrid 48v electric motor, eight speed automatic with quattro 4WD.

Performance: 155 mph, 0–62 mph 5.9 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 48.7 mpg, (27–45mpg during our road test driving).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 emissions 145 g/km, VED road tax £200 First Year rate then £140 Standard rate plus £310 supplement each year for five years as the vehicles costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 31%.

Insurance Group: 44E.

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 5,172 mm (16.97 ft), W 1,945 mm (6.38 ft), H 1.473 mm (4.83 ft), boot space 505 litres (17.83 cu.ft), four doors/five seats.