

Source: Steven Cole Smith, Automotive Editor
Column: TEST DRIVE: 2002 AUDI A6 QUATTRO
Type: REVIEW

MUSCULAR BUT MANNERLY, THE AUDI COMES IN A RANGE OF TASTY FLAVORS

Quietly competent but never bland, even the entry-level version of the Audi A6 Quattro -- of course, "entry level" will still set you back about \$38,000 -- is a car for all seasons. It's big enough to be plenty roomy, small enough to be maneuverable, powerful enough to entertain, and with the Quattro's all-wheel-drive, among the safest cars to drive in bad weather.

The A6 is the middle Audi. With an overall length of 192 inches, it's 6.2 inches shorter than the flagship A8, and 13 inches longer than the A4. Exterior styling is handsome and functional, but never flashy. Arguably, it could use a little more flash.

The test car had the new 220-horsepower 3.0-liter V-6 engine, which replaces last year's 2.8-liter. The new engine is a bit smoother, and you can feel its extra 20 horses. You won't hear them, though -- no one makes quieter engines than Audi.

The 3.0-liter A6 sedan is the base model, available with either front-wheel-drive or, for an extra \$1,750, the Quattro all-wheel-drive. There's also a 3.0-liter Avant Quattro wagon available. All other A6 models are Quattros.

And those models include a sedan powered by a 2.7-liter V-6 that has twin low-pressure turbochargers, giving it a very spunky 250 horsepower. And there's a sedan with a 4.2-liter, 300-horsepower V-8 that feels like a scaled-down version of the big A8, which is basically what it is. And there's the S6 Avant wagon with a fire-breathing 340-horsepower version of that 4.2-liter V-8 that could make anyone reconsider the station wagon's image.

And finally, there's the Allroad Quattro, a cross between a station wagon and a sport-ute. Audi doesn't consider the Allroad part of the formal A6 lineup, but it has mostly A6 parts underneath, and has the twin-turbo 2.7-liter V-6.

With such an extensive lineup, the A6's price range is pretty dramatic. The 3.0-liter A6 front-wheel-drive version starts at \$36,045, and the S6 wagon lists at just under \$60,000. All the rest are in-between.

There's an argument that the best bargain is our 3.0-liter Quattro, which came with \$3,550 in options that included a glass sunroof, leather upholstery with heated seats, steering wheel-mounted controls, an audible rear obstacle detection system and Xenon headlights. The bottom line, with freight, was \$41,345, a competitive price. This gets you the vast majority of what makes the A6 such a nice car.

Of course, the list of standard equipment is a long one, too: Anti-lock disc brakes, 16-inch tires with alloy wheels, stability control, front, side and side-curtain airbags; air conditioning, cruise control, full power equipment and a very good stereo with a six-disc CD changer.

Inside, the A6 has a friendly, warm interior. Controls are mostly intuitive, gauges easy to read. There's plenty of room up front, and once you get in the rear seat through the rather narrow door opening, it's fine for two, a little cramped for three. If there's only two in back, the flip-down console doubles as an arm rest and cup holder.

On the road, the 3.0-liter A6 is always composed and well-mannered, but isn't as spirited as the 2.7-liter turbo version. That model costs \$2,600 more, and it's available with the automatic or a six-speed manual transmission for the same price. The 2.7 is the choice of enthusiasts.

It's of value that Audi has so many distinct flavors in the A6 lineup. This is, after all, why test drives were invented.

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Memo: Automotive editor Steven Cole Smith test-drives vehicles provided by the manufacturers. He can be reached at scsmith@orlandosentinel.com, or 407-420-5699.

Illustration: BOX: CONSUMER INFORMATION

Base price: \$37,150

Price as tested: \$41,345

EPA-rated fuel mileage: 17 mpg city, 25 mpg highway

Details: All-wheel-drive sedan powered by a 3-liter, 220-hp V-6 with a 5-speed automatic transmission

PHOTO: A nice round number. The A6 Quattro is in the middle of an attractive Audi pack, delivering a lot for a price that is competitive.

AUDI

PHOTO: Cozy Corner. The Audi sports a warm and friendly interior with easy-to-read gauges, intuitive controls and ample room.

AUDI

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