

AUDI A3 SALOON

By David M Ross

If anybody can create generate success with a compact saloon in a hatchback heartland it's Audi. Riding the crest of a wave with virtually every model in its armoury Audi admits it is faced with a

momentous task as buyers have shown scant interest in anything other than hatchbacks and small estates in the compact sector. However, what might kickstart a sales stampede is Audi's ability to live up to its "executive" claims because that's exactly what its new A3 saloon is, a compact executive model with enough chutspah to attract buyers previously convinced only a hatch will suffice.



And what a humdinger of a car this newcomer is. There are both petrol and diesel engines on offer in both S-line and Sport guises and, while I admit to being somewhat of a diesel-head, I

have to say I was completely won over by the stunningly capable and utterly delightful 1.4litre TFSI engine that powered my Sport spec test model.

With just 1,400ccs, you might think a lack of torque would be evident but it's nothing of the sort thanks to direct petrol injection and a forceful turbocharger. The result is an instant and powerful response to the accelerator at low revs with no lag whatsoever. And the power keeps coming right up to a rev limit a diesel can only dream of.

But what of the new Saloon itself? Firstly, were it not for the strong demand for this type of vehicle in both America and China, Audi admits it would not have ventured into saloon territory with such a small car. But now it has and, with the only way Audi knows how to build cars, the new Saloon comes with such a high level of construction and interior fittings, the German car maker has virtually invented a new sector,



that being for compact premium four door saloons.

With the UK and European market, Audi admits it is simply dipping its toe in the water but, when shown amongst Audi's supercars and race cars at the recent Goodwood Revival meeting, the new Saloon was besieged by people wanting to know more about it. So Audi could be on to a very good thing with this car as it has arrived just as so many buyers are looking to purchase premium models. And being a compact, prestigious car, it fits perfectly with so many people's aspirations.



There's no question, the hatchback's success has been built on practicality and some of that is missing with the Saloon. But, for many, it's just not needed. Especially with a saloon which can boast a decent sized boot in which articles can be locked away out of sight.

Looks are definitely on the A3 Saloon's side. Compact, a bit like a shrunk-in-the-wash A4 and with Audi's highly visible "Tornado Line" running the length of the sides, this is a very attractive car and fully able to sit happily alongside other larger prestige models.

As for the interior, it's beautifully laid out, understated and with uncomplicated controls set just where you want them. And, with plenty of interior space – the Saloon is 146mm longer than the Sportback – and really excellent seats, this is a car that will be easy and rewarding to live with.

As to which engine to plump for, it's a matter of personal choice. But there is plenty of choice. "My" test car's ultra-smooth 1.4TFSI unit with fuel-saving COD or Cylinder-on-demand, will leave nobody feeling short changed but there is also a 180bhp 1.8-litre TFSI and, for those who prefer a diesel, there's the smooth and near silent 150bhp 2.0 TDi. A more zippy diesel sporting 180bhp will be along shortly.

Close behind will come an S3 quattro Saloon line-up with a couple of 300PS variants and similar Sportbacks costing upwards of £30,000. The test 1.4TFSI with 7-speed S tronic transmission was priced at, considering the high level of engineering and equipment, a reasonable £23,660 but, with options, it topped out at no less than £28,330. There's a £550 price premium from A3 Sportback to A3 Saloon for like-for-like models.

Other important 1.4TFSi aspects include a combined fuel consumption of 60.1mpg and CO2 emissions of 109g/km. As to the 0-62mph sprint, this is despatched in 8.4 seconds. All show the benefit to be derived from a car that weighs as little as 1,250kg.

