

NEW AUDI A3

By Jim Mc Cauley



Audi has launched the latest evolution of its best-selling A3 range with fresh styling and a range of new engines and new technologies. From launch, all body variants are available starting with the 3-door hatchback model which opens the pricing at just over £19,000. Joining the 3-door are the 5-door Sportback, Saloon and Cabriolet.

Design-wise, the new models feature sharper styling with the established softly radiused grille now stretched out to a defined hexagonal outline with the upper edges leading out to the narrow headlamp units. Along with the lower air intakes taken to the outermost extremes of

the car, the result visually widens the model and endows it with an even more assertive presence. Rear light clusters are also narrower and slice inwards to the edge of the number plate.

As with all VAG ranges, there is a wide choice of engines and at the models' UK launch a sample three engines were driven to illustrate just some of the choice available.

With the A4 having grown in proportions over the years, the A3 saloon is now a nicer balanced car in terms of overall body shape with particular appeal for those who prefer a more compact saloon. Test choice had the 2.0 litre TDI turbo diesel engine with 150PS on tap and a strong 340Nm of torque from 1750rpm. While the car is available with the standard manual gearbox, the model driven was fitted with the company's 6-speed S-tronic dual clutch transmission, taking drive to the front wheels. Power delivery is not only super smooth from this engine but also super refined with a

pleasant exhaust note disguising any remaining hints of the diesel power unit up front. The car is solid and well planted on the road providing a sense of security and compliance to varying road



surfaces. Initial pace is illustrated by the official 0-62mph time of 8.8 seconds and progress rockets thereafter thanks to the snappy changes of the twin-clutch transmission.



Cabin ambience in this model was enhanced by the £1,200 extra of fine leather upholstery with sports front seats, while other add-ins stoked the car's price of £28,700 up another £10,000 taking it comfortably into the price bracket of its bigger A4 brother.

With regards to running costs, the 2.0 TDI A3 saloon has an official combined fuel consumption of 60.1 mpg while a CO2 figure of 121gms/km puts it in Band D for zero annual road tax.

Second choice on the launch event was a chance to enjoy a relatively sunny day and opt for a convertible – this time with one of the new petrol engines, the 1.4 litre TFSI. This compact power punch has a similar 150PS and again, like the diesel delivers power to the front wheels, this time via a 7-speed S-tronic transmission.

Despite weighing 75kg more than the saloon, the 1.4 Cabriolet is lighter to the feel and more nimble on demanding 'B' roads. Gear changes are again smooth with a 0-62mph time of 8.8 seconds and the ability to keep excellent pace as conditions permit.

With the hood raised, the car is as quiet as the saloon and with the hood lowered, and without a rear wind deflector, front seat occupants are not subjected to undue buffeting, and a normal conversation is possible.

Although an official combined fuel consumption of 57.6 mpg is given, the return on the car's own computer indicated a substantial shortfall on this on the day's drive and set the mind thinking that maybe a diesel is still the better option. Price for the standard car without options is £31,440.



Third engine – and body type – on the day was the 3-door hatchback, powered by the 1.6TDI diesel engine and driving through a 6-speed manual gearbox. Carrying fewer extras than the two models driven previously, this gave a better feel of the basic car which still exudes the classic Audi interior quality. This smaller turbo diesel produces 110 bhp with 250Nm of torque on tap from 1500rpm, and covers the initial 0-62mph sprint in 10.5 seconds.

The manual gearbox is precise to use and permits the driver greater involvement in the control of



the car than the automatic options. Again overall weight is a factor, and the hatchback with the smaller turbo-diesel, weighs in at 85kg lighter than the saloon. This can be seen in the increased agility of the car but at the same time, the feeling of solidity and build quality is in no way lessened. Finished in 'Sprint' specification this 1.6 litre diesel 3-door hatchback is listed at £22,480, and with a CO2 emissions of 107 gms/km is in Band B for zero annual road tax.

One of the main interior features of this model, and all of the new A3 range, is the introduction of the company's virtual cockpit in this sector which features a 12.3 inch high resolution TFT

screen for the driver's information display. This offers a choice of two views – one in which the speedometer and rev counter displays are dominant, or infotainment mode when these two read-outs are reduced in size to provide a larger central window for the navigation map or clearly arranged lists for the phone, radio and audio sectors. The main infotainment panel, however, is the central powered 7-inch screen, and in conjunction with the optional 'Audi Connect' module brings many on-line functions into the car.

And while the standard vehicles come comprehensively equipped, a wide range of options allow the new owner to equip the car to a high level of personalisation, leaving him or her with a bespoke vehicle. Among the extras are adaptive cruise control with 'Pre-sense Front' at £475. This system scans the road ahead for other vehicles through the entire speed range and up to 40mph for pedestrians. On detecting possible contact, the system will respond by initiating partial braking or in the event of no action by the driver, full braking.



Other equipment extras range from 'Magnetic Ride' adjustable shock absorbers at £995, to wheel upgrades from around £1,000, and from heated front seats at £300 to auto-dimming rear view mirror at £125.

The standard range opens with 'SE' specification and progresses through the traditional 'Sport' and 'S-line' trims. An 'SE Technik' upgrade is available only on the 3-door and 5-door variants.

Overall, the new A3 range befits from its sharper exterior styling as well as its cabin upgrades and continually upgraded engine performance. But for the potential buyer there is an envious choice of body types and trim levels giving a total of 127 options before delving into the optional equipment upgrades. But for the buying customer, as opposed to the PCP option, there is the bonus of top



residual values as predicted by CAP which are as much as 44% after three years, depending on model.

(Driven June 2016)