

2013 Audi A7

Sleek sedan with coupe looks and hatchback practicality.

Overview

The 2013 Audi A7 is a luxurious four-passenger sedan that looks like a coupe and offers the functionality of a wagon, thanks to its fastback rear hatch. First introduced for 2012, the Audi A7 is based on the same platform as the Audi A6 and has nearly the same footprint, save for the A7's distinctive sloping roofline.

New for 2013 is the line-topping S7, which features a unique front grille and exterior trim, along with unique 19-inch wheels. Inside, the S7 has beautiful diamond-stitched leather interior. The 2013 Audi S7 is powered the same engine found in the Audi S6, a twin-turbo 4.0-liter V8 that cranks out 420 horsepower and 406 pound-feet of torque. It's paired with a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission. Quattro all-wheel drive comes standard. Audi claims the S7 has a 0-60 mph time of just 4.5 seconds. Also like the S6, the S7 uses cylinder-deactivation technology to improve fuel economy. But performance doesn't come cheap, as the S7 starts at more than \$18,000 more than the base A7.

Audi A7 models are powered by a supercharged 3.0-liter V6, good for 310 horsepower and 325 pound-feet of torque. The only transmission offered is an 8-speed automatic. Quattro all-wheel drive is standard. EPA fuel economy ratings for the 2013 Audi A7 are a respectable 18/28 mpg City/Highway.

Audi isn't the first to make a luxury sedan that nestles into the emerging space between sporty and spacious. Others include the BMW 6 Series Gran Coupe, Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class, Jaguar XF, and Porsche Panamera. Most of these are about the same size, with the exception of the Mercedes, which is a couple of inches smaller. Acura dipped its toe in the water with its coupe-like ZDX, but the company announced the ZDX would be discontinued after the 2013 model year.

The silhouette of the Audi A7 is sleek. It's more like the Jaguar XF than any of the other four-door coupes. From the rear, the stretching roofline and glass of the A7 give it a retro look, like some of the fastback sports cars of the 1950s.

The A7 interior is lovely, the dashboard wrapping around the driver and into the front doors, the beautiful instrument panel perfectly framed by the three-spoke sport steering wheel. Legroom is acceptable in the rear seats. The 60/40 rear seatback flips down to a flat floor, and opens up the rear for cargo carrying that rivals a station wagon, accessible under the fifth door, the liftback.

We love the Google Earth navigation screen in the A7, which makes a fantastic map to follow, on a big pop-up screen. As for the navigation system itself, the good news is it will allow you to set a destination while the car is moving, but we found its accuracy lacking.

In the drivetrain department, the V6 is fast and silky, and the 8-speed Tiptronic automatic transmission is seamless. Audi Drive Select allows the driver to choose one of four modes: Comfort, Auto, Dynamic and Individual. These modes adjust the transmission, power steering and engine to modify shift points, steering boost and throttle characteristics.

We found the A7 ride was smooth and comfortable at all times, even with 20-inch wheels and a sport suspension. The more we challenged the A7 in corners, the better it felt. However, we found the 20-inch tires sensitive to road surfaces, the car tending to move around at 70 mph. This may have been due to the optional low-profile 20-inch tires or the new electromechanical power steering system. The A7 Premium model may be more stable in this regard with its 18-inch wheels and tires.

Model Lineup

The 2013 Audi A7 comes in three trim levels: Premium, Premium Plus, and Prestige. All A7 models are powered by a 310-hp 3.0-liter supercharged V6 mated to an 8-speed Tiptronic automatic transmission and using Audi's quattro all-wheel drive. EPA fuel economy ratings for the 2013 Audi A7 are 18/28 mpg city/highway.

The high-performance 2013 Audi S7 comes in a single trim level and is powered by a 420-hp twin-turbo 4.0-liter V8. An eight-speed dual clutch transmission and all-wheel-drive are standard.

A7 Premium (\$60,100) includes leather upholstery, three-zone automatic climate control, heated eight-way power seats with four-way lumbar adjustment, driver memory functions, a tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, cruise control, an auto-dimming rearview mirror, a power sunroof, the Audi MMI infotainment interface, Bluetooth and a Bose audio system with a CD player, satellite radio capability and an iPod cable. Exterior features include automatic bi-xenon headlights, LED running lights, a power liftgate, automatic wipers, heated windshield washers, heated mirrors and 18-inch wheels.

A7 Premium Plus (\$63,800) adds keyless ignition/entry, front and rear parking sensors, a rearview camera, auto-dimming outside mirrors, navigation with voice activation and an upgraded version of Audi's MMI system, HD radio and 19-inch wheels.

A7 Prestige (\$66,150) upgrades to four-zone automatic climate control, ventilated front seats, a power-adjustable steering wheel, an upgraded 14-speaker Bose audio system, adaptive headlights and special S line exterior trim.

Options include a Cold Weather package with heated steering wheel and rear seats (\$450), sport suspension and three-spoke steering wheel with 19-inch wheels (price varies by trim level), full LED headlamps (\$1400) and an upgraded 1300-watt Bang & Olufsen sound system with 15 speakers (\$5,900). One notable option is a rear bench (\$350) that replaces the two bucket seats in back, which enables the A7 to seat five.

Safety options include rear thorax side airbags (\$350), a package that bundles power folding mirrors, side blind zone monitoring and a pre-collision safety system (\$500), as well as a Driver Assistance Package (\$2,500), which includes the power-folding mirrors, side monitoring system and pre-collision system, plus full-range adaptive cruise control with stop-and-go capability.

Audi S7 (\$78,800) comes fully loaded with diamond-stitched leather upholstery, four-zone automatic climate control, 12-way power heated front sport seats with driver memory settings, a power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, keyless ignition/entry, park assist with rearview camera, garage door opener, power sunroof, Audi Drive Select with adaptive air suspension, real ash wood accents, navigation, Bluetooth, a Bose audio system with CD/DVD player, HD radio and iPod cable, and the Audi Connect interface, which allows users to turn the car into a WiFi hotspot (includes six-month subscription). Exterior features include heated auto-dimming sideview mirrors, adaptive xenon headlights, power hatchback and 19-inch wheels.

Walkaround

Stylish horizontal headlamps (xenon standard, LED optional), along with the large horizontal air intakes underneath the headlamps, balance the large Audi grille and minimize its boxiness. It's the same nose as on the A8. The matching upswept angles of the headlamps and air intakes, on the corners of the rounded nose, suggest motion, if not flight. They make that big and busy front end work.

The standard xenon headlight system is called all-weather lighting, including lights that replace fog lamps that would otherwise be mounted in the air intakes. The standard daytime running lights are LED. Audi claims that the optional LED lighting, as on our Prestige test model or as a stand-alone option, makes night look like daylight, but we couldn't quite see that. The lights were indeed excellent, but they were excellent headlamps lighting the darkness, not erasing it.

The silhouette of the Audi A7 is sleek, more like the Jaguar XF than any of the other four-door coupes; the Mercedes CLS remains the boldest and most striking. The coefficient of drag is a neat 0.30 Cd. From the rear, the stretching roofline and glass of the A7 give it a retro look, like some of the fastback sports cars of the 1950s. It almost looks as if it was added on to an Audi sedan, like the A7 was designed nose-to-tail, rather than all at once. But at the least, it's clearly a different Audi.

There's an integrated rear spoiler that automatically raises at 80 mph and retracts at 50; or it can be deployed manually.

Interior Features

The stylish interior is lovely, as one should expect from a car of this caliber. The dashboard suggests a wide horizontal arc, wrapping around the driver and into the front doors. There are two types of standard perforated leather, called Milano or Valcona, with aluminum-look trim. The standard wood trim is ash, with dark walnut or brushed aluminum optional.

The beautiful instrument panel stands out before the driver's eyes, perfectly framed by the three-spoke sport steering wheel with spokes at 3 and 9 o'clock. The white-on-black numbers on the tachometer and speedometer are crystal clear. Between them there's a digital display with all the right information, that allows you to switch between "short-term memory" or "long-term memory," for example with fuel mileage. The excellent thing about this display is that all the information is there at all times: no scrolling. It all fits without being crowded. And it's readable in the sun.

The standard Audi A7 seats four, not five. However, it can be ordered with an optional rear bench, which replaces the two rear bucket seats and enables the A7 to seat five.

There's acceptable legroom in the rear, 37.0 inches, and spacious cargo room of 24.5 cubic feet behind the seats, accessible under the fifth door, the liftback. The 60/40 rear seatback flips down to a flat floor, and opens up the rear for cargo carrying that rivals a station wagon.

It's super quiet inside, thanks to lined wheelwells and underbody panels, along with a windshield film and special sealing on the doors and windows.

Visibility out the expansive rear glass is good, when it's not obscured by a persistent broad reflection from the beige interior in our A7, so bad in the sun that we had to back up blind; maybe the reflection won't appear with black interior. The sideview mirrors automatically fold at 45-degree angles when you park, but they don't unfold fast enough when you jump in your car and go, for example out of a parking space along the curb.

Our test car came equipped with navigation, and we love the Google Earth display, which is extremely detailed, although some who are used to looking at more basic map displays may complain it's a little too busy. And unlike many nav systems, the Audi's will let you set a destination while the car is moving. Unfortunately for us, our navigation got us lost on two separate occasions. We were smack dab in front of our destination, a Harbor Freight store correctly entered by its address, and the navigation told us to turn around and keep going, the store was 1.2 miles away. Another time we tested it, fully knowing our way between two places, and it sent us on a preposterous loop that ate up 20 minutes. And the voice recognition was futile: you say Gresham, it hears Rochelle, 3000 miles away. Since navigation isn't standard on the base Premier model, we suggest skipping the factory nav and buying an aftermarket GPS unit instead. They're much less expensive, and possibly more accurate.

Driving Impressions

If one were to describe an ideal powertrain for a car like this, it might be the A7's 3.0-liter supercharged V6, making 310 horsepower and 325 pound-feet of torque, and getting an EPA-estimated 18/28 mpg City/Highway miles per gallon.

It's fast and silky. Now attach the seamless 8-speed Tiptronic automatic transmission with paddle shifters, that you can either play with or forget about. Combine them with the superb Audi quattro all-wheel drive system for all-season traction, and you can't be beat. However, premium fuel is required for the high-compression engine with spark ignition and direct injection.

Acceleration from 0 to 60 is 5.4 seconds, quick as you'd ever need to slip safely onto the freeway. You can't even feel the transmission shifting on the climb up to 60 and beyond, and it will maintain 80 mph uphill without kicking down. The Mercedes CLS offers a big V8 with big horsepower, but that means significantly more money and less fuel mileage.

Then there's Audi Drive Select, a program that allows the driver to choose one of four modes: Comfort, Auto, Dynamic, Individual. These modes adjust the transmission, power steering and engine to modify shift points, steering boost and throttle characteristics. With so many options, you can find what makes you happy.

The brakes are powerful with an easy feel requiring no concentration. They'll never be an issue, with gigantic 14-inch front and 13-inch rear rotors.

Our A7 Prestige was equipped with a sport package that included 20-inch wheels, a firmer suspension and low profile, 265/35 summer tires. With this setup, the ride was smooth and comfortable at all times, but lane changing on the freeway kept us on our toes. Since our Prestige had the big wheels and tweaked suspension, we wonder how a simple Premium would move on the freeway. Maybe with less efficiency and directness, which might be a good thing.

The Servotronic speed-sensitive electromechanical power steering system that Audi calls highly efficient. Mechanically, it's most likely true; but when they use adjectives like that, as with the Multi Media Interface, we get leery. It has a quick 15.9:1 ratio, that Audi calls sporty and direct.

Summary

Elegant and convenient, the Audi A7 features coupe-like looks with the accessibility of a hatch, along with a superb powertrain, stylish interior and admirable fuel economy.

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