
Already driven: The premium compacts from Audi

Von Jens Meiners

A facelift in the middle of a vehicle generation's life cycle is part of the standard repertoire of car manufacturers. Usually, this is limited to updating the appearance, and the developers take another close look at where costs can be reduced as inconspicuously as possible. However, Audi has made a little more effort with the recently updated A3: There is finally the long-awaited crossover derivative called "allstreet" - and the sporty S3 makes noticeable improvements in terms of chassis and performance.

We drove all three currently available drive variants: The allstreet with 2.0-litre TDI engine and 150 hp (110 kW), the regular saloon with equally powerful 1.5-litre petrol engine and mild hybridization and the S3 with its now 333 hp (245 kW).

Each version shines with its own character: the 150 hp petrol engine is smooth and agile, the diesel offers plenty of steam from the rev range - and the S3 is more brutal than ever, with a now preloaded turbocharger and significantly more power than before. The sound experience of the S3 can be further enhanced with a titanium exhaust system from Akrapovic, for which a hefty 4180 euros must be paid.

A lightning-fast dual-clutch transmission with seven gears is responsible for power transmission in all engine versions. Incidentally, the consumption figures speak for the clean diesel: on our briskly driven test lap on the country road, the TDI consumed just 5.9 liters per 100 kilometers - less than half as much as the S3. The hybridized petrol engine also consumed significantly more than the diesel. No wonder that customers are still far from ready to say goodbye to this unjustly criticized engine concept.

Incidentally, the cycle values look more friendly: 4.8 liters for the TDI, 5.2 liters for the petrol engine and 8.1 liters for the S3. These figures can easily be achieved with all models, but it is remarkable how economical the diesel remains even at a forced pace.

Further drive variants will gradually be launched on the market. For example, the 1.5-liter petrol engine will also be available with 116 hp (85 kW) - also with a six-speed manual gearbox. An all-wheel drive version will also be added, as well as a powerful plug-in hybrid and the legendary RS3 with a five-cylinder turbo with over 400 hp.

The chassis of the A3 is beyond reproach, and even with the raised center of gravity of the allstreet, the road holding remains precise, firm and light-footed. However, you should not expect any particular off-road capability. The S3 now benefits from an active rear differential taken directly from the RS3, 18-inch front brakes and Bridgestone Potenza Sport tires. The Dynamic Plus button further increases the lateral dynamics considerably: it prevents any tendency to understeer.

Stylistically, the lifted model can be identified above all by the lifted front mask, with a low-positioned, large radiator grille. The Audi logo now breaks through the upper edge - except on the allstreet variant, which was drawn at an earlier stage.

The color range has been slightly adapted, the range of exclusive colors has unfortunately been reduced; the optional gloss package gives the A3 a certain elegance. The headlights have a new interior and now feature a daytime running light in their top version, the 24 pixels of which can be adjusted and changed.

The interior looks more upmarket than before, but continues to emphasize the sporty values of the A3. Depending on the variant, decorative stitching now stretches across the dashboard, and for an extra charge there is not only elegant leather upholstery in black, brown or beige, but also a real wood trim strip. The ambient lighting now also includes the door panels as an option. And there are also optional loudspeakers from the US company Sonos. In future, the Bang & Olufsen brand will be reserved for the luxury-class Audi model series, whose established customers are more familiar with the Danish high-end

manufacturer.

In contrast to the angular, futuristic cockpit design, the steering wheel with its rounded hub has an unusually classic look. Only in conjunction with the comprehensive "Driving and parking assistance package pro and assistance package protection and warning systems plus" does it give way to a much more modern-styled volant.

For the first time, functions can be added after purchasing the vehicle, such as navigation and telematics functions or dual-zone climate control. The speed assistant and automatic high beam can also be purchased retrospectively - for one month, six months, a full year, three years or for the entire service life of the vehicle.

At least as important is the fact that certain functions can also be switched off. For example, the lane departure warning system, which has recently become mandatory in the EU, and the speed warning system, which begins to warn the driver as soon as the recognized speed limit is exceeded by one (1) km/h. These obligatory nanny systems not only work relatively discreetly in the A3 and S3, but they can also be switched off relatively easily and intuitively - a blessing.

The compact models from Ingolstadt, which are convincing in every respect, have their price: the five-door A3 Sportback costs 35,650 euros, the four-door saloon 36,450 euros and the allstreet 37,450 euros; the surcharge for the diesel engine is 2600 euros. The S3 is available from 55,600 euros. With the introduction of the 115 hp version, however, the cost price will fall significantly. (aum/jm)

Images for article



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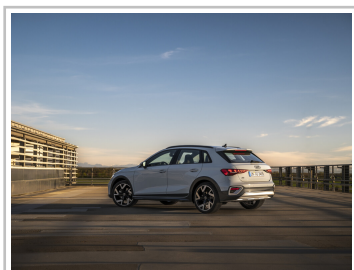


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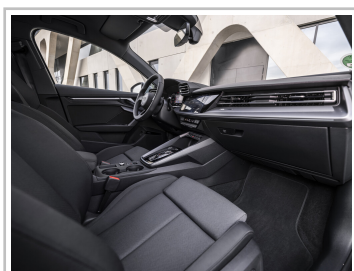


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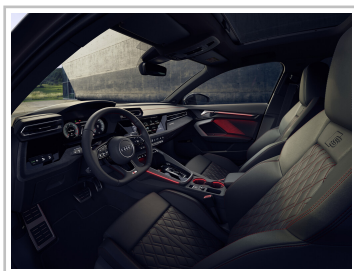


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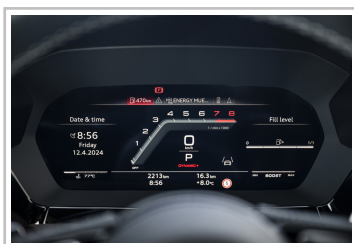


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