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Audi A3 1.8 TFSI Saloon

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Audi's A3 saloon was launched last autumn in the UK, filling a gap in the company's range. Thus, it's their first compact saloon, rivalling BMW's 120, Lexus IS and Mercedes-Benz CLA, for example.

This car is lower, longer and wider than its A3 Sportback counterpart.

Of the four engine varieties available, the 1.8-litre TFSI petrol engine offers the most power; its 180PS enables the car to reach 62 mph in only 7.3 seconds, through Audi's 7-speed S tronic automatic gearbox. Top speed is 146 mph.

These figures are even more impressive when set against the exhaust emissions of just



129g/km (meaning an annual licence outlay of just £95); they also allow Audi to claim class-leading all-round performance. The car's quality construction with Audi's latest strong yet lightweight technology has helped to achieve all of this.

The basic on-the-road price for this model - Saloon 1.8 TFSI Sport S tronic, to give it its full title - is a reasonable £25,955. However, as usual within this sector and certainly with Audi, a long list of options is inevitably going to enter the equation. My test car included the LED light package at £2,000, the Technology package with mobile phone preparation, High with Audi Connect for £1,795, and 19-inch alloy wheels for £1,495. In addition, it featured Adaptive Cruise Control (£575), Bang & Olufsen sound (£750), Audi's parking system plus with front and rear selective display (£595) and £950 panoramic glass sunroof. Adding in all the other eight extras, and the £550 'delivery' charge and £55 first registration fee, the final total for the test car was a whopping £37,280.

After all of that, you have every right to expect to be behind the wheel of a first-class vehicle. Well, Audi have succeeded in this. The A3 saloon is an excellent performer. The acceleration figures speak for themselves and include a very useful surge of power from 60 to 70 mph, so useful on motorways. The car is particularly smooth and quiet. Some road noise is evident, probably because everything else is so muted. The auto box is another excellent feature, providing seamless gear changes, with of course both paddles and manual shift at the gear lever itself if needed. However, these were only ever used for a bit of extra braking down steep hills or slowing down from high speed.

The car's handling was extremely secure, with accurate and nicely-weighted steering. Fast cornering gets automatic help from the electronic differential lock that brakes the inside front wheel very slightly; this minimises understeer and improves traction. Clever safety technology such as this is what premium marques such as Audi are always developing and is in part what you pay for. The brakes were excellent, too. They seemed a little sensitive at first experience, but you soon get the hang of the subtle pressure needed to get them to respond smoothly and progressively.



Audi have sensibly left the choice of ride to the driver: some of their models previously provided a ride that was a touch uncomfortably hard; now, even on the so-called 'Sport' version, it is a forgiving and comfortable experience.

The car is quite tight to get into, but once aboard it's a good driving position. It would have been good to have a padded material for the surface where your left knee tends to rest as you drive along.

Space for passengers in the rear allows for two adults to be quite well accommodated. The boot makes the most of what is not a big car.

Much of the test driving, over a week, was done after dark and in the cold and wet. Here, the A3 saloon once again proved a pleasure. Demisting was quick and the heating from the climate control was exemplary. The instrumentation at night is crystal clear, while the expensive LED headlamps certainly provided a first-class view into the blackness ahead.

The Official combined fuel cycle figure is 50.4, considerably better than some rivals. My overall consumption, driving for quite extended periods in heavy, slow-moving traffic as well as relaxed runs on deserted dual carriage ways, with a few very short journeys to the shops, turned out to be 40.0 mpg, according to the car's own trip computer - very acceptable.



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Audi A3 Saloon 1.8 TFSI Sport

Drivetrain: Front engine, front wheel drive

Engine: 1798cc double overhead camshaft, 16 valve four cylinder direct dual injection turbocharged

Power: 180 PS @ 5,100 - 6,200rpm

Torque: 250Nm (140 lb.ft.) @ 1,250 - 5,000 rpm

0-62 mph: 7.3 seconds

Top speed: 146 mph

Fuel consumption, 'official' figures:

'Urban': 47.9 mpg



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'Extra urban': 68.9 mpg

'Combined': 50.4 mpg

Actual figure achieved during our road test: 40.0 mpg over 490 miles.

PRICE ('On The Road'): 1.8 litre TFSI Sport S tronic £25,950

Warranty: Three years/60,000 miles; 12 years rust perforation guarantee