



Audi TT – history to date, and test driving the final variant

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Robin Roberts (WheelsWithinWales and Miles Better News Agency) reflects on the modern classic Audi TT's history, and puts the latest – and last – variant through its paces.

Birth of the Audi TT



The Audi TT - one of the most evocative and transformative models ever to have borne the four rings - celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2023, the year in which production of the Coupé and Roadster models will also draw to a close.

To mark this very significant occasion, Audi UK journeyed to the Isle of Man, whose legendary annual TT race lent the design icon its name, to reflect on its incredible success.

The atmospheric setting also provided the perfect backdrop for the creation of a special collection of images featuring one of the earliest cars alongside two highlight models from the latest range, including the remarkable TT RS Iconic Edition.

“The TT was such a pivotal model for Audi back in the Nineties, and we’re still basking in its afterglow almost three decades after the original concept car became an overnight sensation,” says Director of Audi UK Andrew Doyle.

“It was one of the key catalysts behind the incredible transformation our brand has undergone over the past quarter of a century, and in this special anniversary year its history and legacy richly deserve celebration.”

Crowd pleaser: The TT design study

A rapturous public response to the extraordinary TT Coupé design study unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 1995 was the touchpaper that helped to spark full-scale series production of that original concept, seemingly with very few outward changes, in 1998.

Conceived by American designer Freeman Thomas, under the then Head of Design Peter Schreyer, the concept car’s minimalist, geometric form evoked the principles of Bauhaus design, a ‘less is more’ philosophy in which every line has a purpose, and every shape a function.

Its purity set it worlds apart from contemporary production models, and it was complemented by an imaginatively designed cabin which carried that geometric theme



through into everything from its switchgear and air vents to its many beautiful embellishments in milled aluminium.

Radical even in name

This completely new departure from the familiar hallmarks that defined Audi design wasn't, of course, the only exception to the rule.

When the wraps came off the concept, AUDI AG was already in the process of bolstering its ongoing transformation with a completely new naming convention for its models in each segment, starting with the successors to its compact executive class 80, executive class 100 and luxury class V8 Saloon, which launched as the A4, A6 and A8 respectively.

Rather than fall into line, though, the Audi coupé and roadster stars-in-waiting instead took their name from one of the oldest motorsport events in the world - the famous Tourist Trophy motorcycle race on the Isle of Man.

More commonly known simply as the 'TT', the gruelling road race gave rise to great successes on two wheels for NSU and DKW, brands which were to become intrinsically linked with Audi in its formative years.

In fact, it had also already provided inspiration for the naming of a sporty compact car produced by NSU, the 1965 Prinz 1000 TT.

The same, but different

Unlike many concept cars, which fall victim to practical considerations and are 'toned down' in the transition to production, the TT Coupé was lauded at its 1998 launch for reaching the road virtually unchanged.

At first glance, the integration of a rear side window was the only significant difference, ensuring that the road car retained the show-stopping 'wow factor' that earned its



conceptual ancestor so much international acclaim.

Although there were in fact many other modifications made, not only technically but also in terms of the car's fundamental proportions, they didn't detract from that inherent combination of extraordinarily artful design and beautiful detailing.

Underpinned by keen performance, generous equipment and relatively accessible pricing, that remarkable aesthetic appeal ensured that the TT became one of the most sought-after sports cars of its era.

It was, however, far more than simply a sales success - the TT played a crucial role in directing the world's attention towards Audi, helping to cement public perception of the brand as a design and technology trailblazer and to shore up its ascent to the premium sector position it occupies today.

Suitably keen response and performance in the 1998 Audi TT Coupé, and the convertible TT Roadster which followed it one year later, came courtesy of a transversely mounted 1.8-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine. Outputs ranged from 150 PS to 225 PS, driving either the front wheels or all four wheels via an electronically controlled multi-plate clutch-based quattro system.

A 240 PS version of the 1.8 T unit was reserved for the particularly prized TT quattro Sport, whose enhanced performance was achieved not only through horsepower gains but also by aerodynamic styling details and weight reduction measures, including the absence of a rear seat.

Its output was exceeded only by the 3.2-litre six-cylinder unit with 250 PS, which arrived in 2003 in the TT 3.2 quattro, notable as the first series production Audi model to feature the rapid-shifting twin-clutch automatic transmission known today as S tronic.

Even as far back as the late Nineties, Audi offered its TT customers plenty of scope for personalisation. In addition to colours such as Papaya Orange, Nogaro Blue, Elderberry and



Venetian Violet, available as part of the Audi exclusive programme, customers could equip their TT with stunning detail enhancements such as Moccasin-style leather in a 'baseball glove' design, which looked sensational in the Roadster show car, and transitioned to series production.

Across its eight-year lifespan, which ended in mid-2006, 178,765 first-generation TT Coupés (Type 8N) rolled off the production line. They were complemented by 90,733 TT Roadsters, which joined the range in 1999 and also bowed out in 2006. In all, 56,469 examples of the first-generation TT in all its forms were delivered to customers in the UK.

Second coming

Playing to the strengths of the celebrated first-generation TT design, while also emphasising an evolutionary leap, obviously presented considerable challenges for the designers of the Mk2 model, launched in 2006.

They held true to the guiding principles of minimalism and purity, retaining the unmistakable silhouette with its strong geometric emphasis, while also incorporating new range hallmarks such as the now familiar Audi Singleframe grille design.

Circular motifs remained unifying elements in the exterior and interior detailing, notably in features such as the aluminium fuel filler cap, the round air vents, the gearshift edging and the distinctive gear knob.

The second-generation TT Coupé, along with the Roadster that followed it in 2007, were based on a new platform shared with the second-generation Audi A3. Its predominantly aluminium body used the Audi Space Frame (ASF) as its foundation, helping to reduce overall weight by as much as 90 kg.

It combined front-wheel-drive or quattro all-wheel-drive with 1.8-litre and 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder TFSI engines with 160 PS and 200 PS, and by a naturally aspirated 3.2-litre V6 with 250 PS. In 2008, a 2.0-litre TDI unit also arrived, delivering



copious torque that befitted the TT's character, and staking its claim as the world's first production sports car to use a diesel engine.

The performance stakes were raised a good deal further in 2008, when the TTS, the first ever 'S' version of the TT, channelled 272 PS from an updated 2.0 TFSI unit to the road via quattro drive.

A year later, the high-performance division quattro GmbH, now known as Audi Sport, set another TT performance benchmark with the first TT RS models, which derived 340 PS (or 360 PS in TT RS plus form) from an extensively updated version of the full-blooded five-cylinder turbo engine whose roots can be traced back to the formidable and famously agile quattro rally cars of the Eighties.

Last but by no means least

The third generation of the Audi TT, launched in 2014 and extensively updated in 2018, again avoided unnecessary divergence from a design that had by this point become well and truly iconic.

The singular style of the original 1998 car is reinterpreted for the modern age in a striking and beautifully proportioned body that deftly combines the hallmark circular TT motifs with more sharply defined lines, while also carrying over familiar details, including the round fuel tank cap.

Weight has been reduced further still - in some cases by as much as 50 kg - and onboard technology and connectivity have naturally been greatly enhanced, not least by the addition of the fully digital Audi virtual cockpit, which replaced the analogue dials and MMI monitor and made its Audi range debut in this model.

Over the years power for 'standard' third generation TT models has been provided by 1.8-litre and 2.0-litre TFSI engines with outputs ranging from 180 PS to 245 PS, and by a 2.0-litre TDI with 184 PS, the more powerful variants offering the option of quattro drive.



The latest range combines 197 PS and 245 PS versions of the 2.0 TFSI with S line, Black Edition and particularly amply equipped Final Edition specification levels. A 320 PS version of the 2.0 TFSI is reserved for TTS Black Edition and Final Edition models.

Following further painstaking development, the 2.5-litre five-cylinder TFSI slotted into the engine bay of the third generation TT RS Coupe and Roadster with a significantly enhanced 400 PS output that made for an even more intoxicating driving experience.

A nine-time category winner of the 'International Engine of the Year' award, this irrepressibly punchy and gloriously vocal embodiment of Audi Sport's incredible motorsport pedigree delivers its final flourish for the TT in the latest TT RS Audi Sport Edition models.

Naturally, it also gives voice to the ultra-exclusive TT RS iconic editions created to celebrate the TT's milestone anniversary, of which just 11 exist in the UK.

Throughout its colourful life, the TT has been a particular favourite of performance car devotees in the UK, which has consistently ranked as one of its biggest markets.

Overall, across the three generations, and factoring in every variant including S and RS, a total of just over 157,000 examples found homes here.

But the success of these very special members of the Audi family transcends mere sales data - their influence on the brand's trajectory and reputation can't be overstated, and rightly categorises them among the most significant, and seminal, models in Audi history.

Audi may be reorienting towards electrification as it pursues its aim of becoming a leading provider of sustainable mobility, but the same passion for progress and innovation that gave rise to the TT remains firmly rooted in its Vorsprung durch Technik ethos.

Thankfully, that means history of the kind made by this particular masterpiece of automotive design looks set to regularly repeat itself.



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Robin revisits the TT and test-drives the latest, and last, model...

The Audi TT has reached the end of the road, but what a journey it's been.



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S line 40 TFSI.

I was lucky enough to attend the UK launch of the TT Coupé in Leeds in 1999, a year after it went into production and on sale in Germany and now, a quarter of a century on, production has ceased.



In that time there have been only three generations of the car but it developed from Coupé to Roadster and even teased an Off-Road Concept coming with a bewildering range of four,



five and six cylinder engines and a host of special editions over its 25 years.

Named after the legendary Isle of Man TT Races where Audi predecessors, DKW and NSU, gained fame and distinction in the early 1900s with their racing motorcycles, the Audi TT is also said to be the abbreviation for “Technology and Tradition”.

Whatever it says on the can, it’s the contents which fill an enthusiast with satisfaction and generate a near permanent smile behind the wheel.

Today, it turns heads as easily as it did a quarter of a century ago so no wonder it’s been the hairdressers’ car of choice for decades.

The Audi TT has gone to over 157,000 UK drivers from its launch and in reality it’s changed very little and kept its ‘less is more’ design concept with the two-plus-two Coupé sacrificing the rear space to accommodate the folding fabric roof and pop-up wind deflector in the Roadster.

Roadster S line 40 TFSI on test

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In its run out year the range shrunk to just a handful of models including our Roadster S line 40 TFSI test car with a bit more kit over the entry level model but which can be maxed out with an extensive list of packs and individual options.

The test car’s total added kit cost £5,880 and included deluxe automatic A/C, Bang & Olufsen system, comprehensive technology pack, and plus pack along with Nappa hide and S-scrolls on the headrests. The Audi virtual cockpit replaces round dials but the theme of the ‘four circles’ carries over with details such as the familiar filler cap.



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The familiar Audi 2.0 litre engine is a workhorse of the Volkswagen Group and tuned to give 197 PS in the TT Roadster S line which it eagerly poured out, not in neck-snapping style but more a touring laid back get-you- there gallop.



Combined with the acclaimed seven-speed dual clutch automatic transmission, the changes were barely perceptible at all but highest engine revs and the overall fuel consumption was easily sitting in the 40 mpg sector.

Brakes were delightfully balanced so a gentle toe curl on the pedal produced a rapid and controlled deceleration while a stronger shove from shoes easily pulled it up with utter



control and no skidding.

The flat-bottomed steering wheel felt a bit different winding along country lanes but the feedback was precise, the turning circle compact and there was plenty of assistance squeezing into tight parking spaces.

Frequently used stalks and secondary switches were all neatly and conveniently placed close to driver's hands and the clever virtual, adjustable cockpit is one of the best in any car as well as being very legible in any light. The ability to increase the size of the map display is also very useful.

The sophisticated automatic air conditioning system is a godsend when the roof is closed on a rainy day and even welcome with the roof down to warm feet at other times. It had no trouble filling the two-seater cabin with huge quantities of air at a chosen temperature, backed up by powered door windows.

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With the powered fabric roof quickly folded in under ten seconds and the wind deflector in place occupants could enjoy a trip at motorway speed without too much turbulence disturbing them.



Oddments room was very tight in the cabin with small compartments and the small boot only accommodated some soft bags or modest overnight case.



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Access was fairly easy but getting out demanded a bit more dexterity due to the low-lying platform and seats but once inside they were surprisingly comfortable despite their modest adjustment range.



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Visibility was clear with the roof stowed but there were over the shoulder blindspots when it was covering the cabin and the additional reversing sensors were a must.

Headlights were very good with a long, wide beam and the wipers swept a wide area of glass.

The powertrain was smooth and quiet, the wind noise surprisingly modest and this meant the road noise rumbling from the tyres and suspension was more noticeable and at times the ride was bumpy due to the 19- inch wheels and tyres picking up everything.

Acceleration from rest was reasonable and it was very composed on main roads and motorways, with good pickup for overtaking, and that excellent miserly fuel consumption.

The handling was very surefooted and predictable with good grip and responses to brakes and steering, only occasionally being thrown off line by mid-corner bumps. Easing off the throttle quickly tightened the line on curves without making it twitch.

VERDICT

There is no doubt the Audi TT Roadster is an iconic and individual car and as enjoyable to drive as it was 25 years ago, combining simplicity and sophistication and delivering a rewarding return in what will become, I am sure, a future classic with a unique character.

For: Lively, agile, economical, well made, comfortable well equipped cabin, powered hood.

Against: Small boot and oddments space, restricted interior, road noise, rear visibility with erect hood.



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FAST FACTS

Model: Audi TT Roadster S line 40 TFSI

Price: £45,295

Mechanical: 197 PS 4 cyl 2.0 turbo-petrol 7 speed autoMax Speed: 151 mph

0 - 62 mph: 6.9 secs

Combined MPG: 41

Insurance Group: 41

C02 emissions: 159 g/km

Bik rating: 36%, £645FY, £570SRx5

Warranty: 3 years/ 60,000 miles

Size: L 4.20 m (13.78 ft), W 1.85 m (6.07 ft), H 1.36 m (4.46 ft) Bootspace: 280 litres (9.89 cu.ft)

Kerbweight: 1,370 kg (3,020 kg)

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