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New Audi S8 Plus First Impressions

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Supercar Pace from a Luxury Saloon.

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Not only are Audi's UK record sales driven by the constant addition of new core model ranges, they have now embarked on launching performance-enhancing derivatives with Plus and RS Performance models.

The Audi A8 range of large executive saloons with quattro all wheel drive is long established both in standard and long wheelbase forms with powerful petrol and diesel engine options. The top performance model of the range until now has been the S8 4.0 litre V8 TFSI



turbocharged petrol 520 hp quattro version priced at £81,395. Now comes the 4.0 litre, V8 TFSI 605 hp Plus version at £97,715.

Its competitors Audi UK sees as the Jaguar XJR V8 Supercharged petrol with 550 hp, costing £91,775, the Mercedes AMG S63 685 hp V8 petrol at £121,705 and the Porsche Panamera Turbo S 570 hp V8 petrol at £131,152.

The 2016 S8 Plus 4.0 TFSI V8 605 hp cylinder-on-demand turbocharged petrol engine is mated with an 8-speed auto gearbox with quattro all wheel drive plus a sports differential. Its top speed is restricted to 155 mph but Audi offer a de-restriction service which pushes up the top speed to 189 mph, faster than its competitors except the Panamera which will provide a 192 mph top speed. The Audi's zero to 62 mph acceleration time is just 3.8 seconds, again faster than all but the Panamera which has the same time.

The hugely responsive V8 high revving direct injection turbo petrol engine of the S8 Plus delivers 750 Nm (553 lb.ft) of torque from 2,500 rpm right up to 5,500 rpm, so the power delivery is strong and linear more or less right through the rev range.

The Combined Cycle fuel consumption is 28.2 mpg and on my brief test drive using the busy A roads in Leicestershire the figure was 21.7 mpg. With CO2 emissions of 231 g/km VED road tax is £885 for the First Year rate and then £500 thereafter. Company car executive drivers will pay the maximum 37% in Benefit-in-Kind tax.

So how many of these executive express large saloons will be sold in the UK? Audi UK say just over 1,200 A8s were sold in the UK last year, the S8 accounted for 10% of those and the new S8 Plus is expected to take just 3% so around 36 cars making them very rare and probably collectable in the future.

The S8 Plus is mostly about ownership status and must-have speed, even if it cannot be legally used in the UK. So to put it into context just how fast accelerating the S8 Plus large executive saloon is, the equally new 2016 Plus version of the Audi's supercar two seater Coupe - the R8 5.2 litre V10, 610hp version, covers the zero to 62mph acceleration cycle in



3.2 seconds and has a top speed of 205 mph.

In addition to outright performance the S8 Plus retains its executive saloon fixtures and fittings so this is no stripped-out track car for road use. The exterior has a carbon fibre front lip spoiler, side skirts, rear diffuser, and a dual branch sports exhaust system with twin oval chrome tailpipes on each side. There is also a rear boot lid spoiler and darkened glass rear light clusters. At the front are Matrix LED headlights and Audi's signature front, plus rear, sweeping indicator lights. Setting off the sports body enhancements are 21-inch, 9J double spoke black alloy wheels shod with 275/35 ZR21 tyres. For ride comfort or sports performance the saloon has S Sport adaptive air suspension with their Dynamic steering system which alters the steering angle and feedback depending on the speed of the car.

Inside the S8 Plus retains all the luxury features of an executive saloon but with sports enhancements such as sports seats in leather - the front ones with memory functions, heating and lumbar support. There is double acoustic glazing with electric sunblinds for the rear and rear door windows. There is a three-spoke sports multi-function steering wheel, gear shift paddles, 'S' instruments, a seven-inch colour display screen, BOSE surround sound system, mobile phone preparation, Audi parking system with overhead views and the gear select lever is surrounded by upper inlays in carbon effect trim and lower inlays with brushed aluminium.



Driver support functions are plentiful and include adaptive cruise control, blind spot monitoring, Stop & Go, Audi's drive select with four pre-configured modes, plus an individual one, and climate control - but the important head-up display function will cost an extra £1,340.

Considering the Audi S8 Plus is a four door, four seater executive highly equipped saloon of over five metres (16.4 ft) in length, nearly two metres (6.6 ft) wide and weighing almost two tonnes, the brutish performance is astonishing and puts it in the niche supercar class. The near 200 mph top speed if de-restricted is by-the-way and legally unusable unless you live in Germany. The most impressive feature of this car is the docile way it conducts its day-to-day driving, stop start through to 50 mph commuting speeds. But when opportunities arise, or needs must to overtake long lines of slow moving traffic, plant the right foot and be



prepared to be pushed back into your seat as the acceleration builds. And relentlessly it builds almost right through the entire rev range with virtually no tailing off once high revs are reached; it just keeps on pulling.

The V8 turbocharged petrol power unit is not at all peaky, it can be very docile at low everyday speeds. Select the Comfort driving mode and it is another refined and sedate cruiser. Toggle through the driving modes to Dynamic and take off is achieved with a soundtrack to suit as the active exhaust opens wide to provide a deep V8 howl.

The eight-speed gearbox isn't a twin-clutch system so changes are not quite as slick but they are fast enough either up or down through the gear ratios. The steering is well-weighted but could do with more feedback, although the turn-in is sharp with good grip thanks to the quattro all-wheel drive system. Despite its size and speed there is little body roll during cornering.



Verdict

It all adds up to a very good and fast car to live with if you can afford it.

Therein lies the crunch because the Audi A8 and its S8 derivatives are not in their first flush of youth, with the next generation due in 2017. In some areas - but not performance - they are showing their age against the new BMW 7 Series and Mercedes S-Class if you are an executive car user who wants the latest model. The appeal of the S8 Plus is purely down to its performance but how many UK customers want just that? They want performance all wrapped up in a nice new package. It could be that the small numbers of these cars available go to senior executives of Audi UK and their Dealer Principals rather than



members of the business community.

For: Outright blisteringly fast performance for an executive high specification luxury saloon, brilliant high torque petrol engine, poised handling, high specification, beautifully built.

Against: High price, high running costs, high taxes, high cost insurance, low demand.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC IN BRIEF:



Audi S8 Plus, 4.0 TFSI quattro executive 4-door saloon.

Engine: 4.0 litre, V8, TFSI cylinder-on-demand turbocharged direct injection petrol, 605 hp, 750 Nm (553 lb.ft) of torque from 2,500 rpm.

Transmission: 8-speed tiptronic auto, quattro all wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62 mph: 3.8-seconds.

Top speed: 155mph (de-restricted, 189mph).

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 28.2 mpg (21.7 mpg on a brief test drive).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 231 g/km, VED road tax £885/£500, BIK company car tax 37%.

Insurance group: 50E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: 4 doors/4 seats, L 5,147 mm (16.89 ft), W 1,949 mm (6.39 ft), H 1,458 mm (4.78 ft), boot 520 litres (18.36 cu.ft).

Price: £97,715.