



Audi A6 Automatic

Featuring 2.4SE Saloon



What's different?

Five-speed automatic with "dynamic shift programme" and Tiptronic manual override facility.

AUDI'S A6 IS A FINE CAR BUT IT'S UP against some really distinguished opposition from Volvo, Saab and BMW especially. It's probably at its best as an Avant (estate car) with a 2.4 V6 engine, although we would be hard pressed to say whether we prefer the diesel or the petrol version, for sheer driver-enjoyment.

The petrol is sublimely smooth and discreet at any speed, but it lacks the diesel's low-rev vigour; it needs more downchanging to release its full acceleration. Cue to auto version, which proves ideally suited to the role.

This is a box of tricks that tries hard to think your thoughts for you, sensing the most recent driving style and making gearshifts earlier or later to suit the mood. Even so, there still remained times when it took second gear when we would have chosen third, and hunted up and down between fourth and top when the road undulated up and down hill.

Of course, you can put a stop to all this by moving the lever sideways into Tiptronic manual mode. The accelerator response then feels more meaty, with the torque converter locked up and, within certain limits, you determine which gear you should be in. However, it does change down if the engine speed falls below 1300rpm; rise above 6400rpm and (not unreasonably) it will change up by itself, even in manual mode.

This results in some confusion about which ratio you're actually in and the inaudibility of the engine actually adds to this confusion. There's ingratitude for you! Maybe a bolder facia display would help – the present one is hard to take in at a glance.

Ultimate acceleration, as well as fuel consumption, isn't seriously impaired compared with the manual version – the high fifth gear actually improves motorway economy by 2mpg, but most other driving conditions undermine mpg by the same amount.

The A6 saloon retains the fully folding back seats of the Avant, but accommodation for both occupants and luggage isn't quite as generous. Neither is the ride quite as unruffled as one would expect, off well-surfaced main roads.

Nevertheless, with good creature comforts and real quality that's manifest from the superb Bose radio to the high standard of braking and rust protection, the A6 makes a deeply favourable impression.

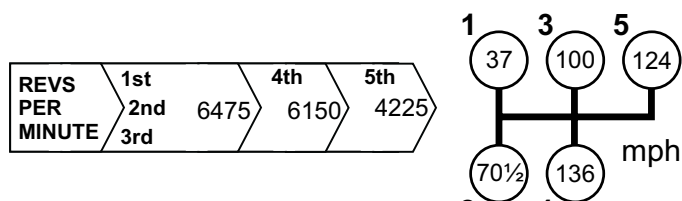
PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
AUTO - USING KICKDOWN		2.2	4.5	6.9	9.6
IN 4TH GEAR		6.0	11.7	16.8	21.9
IN 3RD GEAR		3.5	6.7	10.0	13.6

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
AUTO/4TH SPEED RANGES	3.2/No		4.7/10.8		
		4.5/11.7		5.1/10.2	

Maximum speeds - using kickdown



2390rpm observed at 70mph in top gear
on level track = 29.3mph per 1000rpm

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Type of use - with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	18
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	22½
Motorway (70mph cruising)	35
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	28½
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	31½
Typical mpg overall	29½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	60 litres/390 miles

*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Although most automatic gearboxes have employed the same basic method of operation – torque converter and epicyclic gears – for several decades, they have become more sophisticated around the edges.

This A6's is a classic example of current thinking – five ratios, a lock-up clutch to prevent slip within the fluid coupling and a sophisticated electronic brain to control the shifts in a way that suits both the terrain and the driver's mood of the moment. Audi dubs it “dynamic shift programme – DSP”; others call it fuzzy logic.

However, the most recent trend has been to provide the driver with full manual control of the gear steps – Tiptronic is what they call this. The lever is moved laterally from Auto to become a fore-and-aft manual selector – nudge it forward to change up a cog, the other way to downchange. A head-up display in the dial cluster helps the driver to know which gear is selected and the 'box will “take-over” in extreme circumstances – starting from rest in a high gear can't happen, for example.

