



Audi Allroad



THE ALLROAD IS A MEMBER OF the rare but growing breed of up-market estate cars equipped with full-time four-wheel drive, thus making it equally at home when cruising city streets or tackling tricky terrain.

It's a kind of A6 Avant quattro with attitude – not to mention a wider track, butch wheelarches, reinforced bumpers and a redesigned grille, all of which give it a more muscular look. Underneath, there are stainless steel skid-plates.

There's a choice of two engines; the silky V6 2.7-litre twin-turbo petrol unit gives sparkling acceleration (0-60mph in about 7sec), while the 2.5 V6 turbo-diesel provides an extra 10mpg and its extra torque proves invaluable off road. It's not as refined, however, and its narrower rev band demands more gearchanging.

We spent most of our time with the Allroad on a dry and undemanding off-road course. Not surprisingly, it proved unstoppable thanks largely to electronic traction control that diverts power from a spinning wheel to others that have grip.

The Audi's long front and rear overhangs can be a liability, but when it comes to the seriously rough stuff the driver can call on the optional low-ratio transfer gearbox and the Allroad's party piece, the electronically controlled air-sprung suspension. This has four different ride heights giving an overall difference in ground clearance of 6.6cm – the maximum being only 2cm lower than a

Land Rover Discovery's. The clever system adjusts the car's height automatically, according to road speed, but the driver can manually select any of the settings at the touch of a button.

On tarmac, the Allroad feels like a slightly softer-sprung A6, providing a comfortable ride and a feeling of stability at speed. It tends to roll more, though, and there's an unfortunate loss of precision to the steering, as well.

Inside, it's very much standard A6, but in this case there are more laterally supportive front seats, special colour schemes and clearly legible chrome-ringed instruments.

Behind the spacious and comfortable back seat the luggage deck is plushly finished and makes this roomy five-door holdall a clever compromise between versatility and elegance.

VERDICT

This Audi soft-roader is likely to get big 4x4s a bad name. Unless driven in extreme conditions (which is unlikely) it can do all they can but in a more civilised manner, while looking elegant into the bargain. Bargain? Well, perhaps not, but the high price includes a lot of techno-wizardry that proves its worth both on and off the beaten track.

VITAL STATISTICS

length	481
width (exc/inc mirrors)	193-196
front - legroom	85-107
- headroom (with s/roof)	89-95
rear - typical legroom	98
- typical kneeroom	76
- headroom	98
- hiproom	132
load space (all seats in use) (litres/cu ft)	480/16.9
load length (seats up/folded)	102/180
load width	104-115
load sill (inside/outside)	4/65
boot/load aperture height	43/75

BRIEF SPECIFICATION 2.5TDI

engine 2496cc, V6, 24 valves. 180bhp/273 lb ft with turbocharger and intercooler. 70-litre fuel tank
drive 6-speed manual, permanent four-wheel drive
suspension front: four-link air-sprung struts, dampers and anti-roll bar. Rear: double wishbones, air-sprung struts, and anti-roll bar
tyres 225/55 R17W Allroad
brakes discs all round. ABS and EBD standard
0-62mph* 9.5 sec
max speed* 129mph *maker's figure
official combined mpg 31.7

THE ALL-ROAD RANGE

body executive 4x4 estate
trim levels one only
engines petrol: V6 2.7/250bhp
 turbo-diesel: V6 2.5/180bhp
drive front-wheel drive, 6-speed manual
auto option 5-speed Tiptronic
notable features self-levelling air suspension, 2300kg towing capability. Options: low ratio 'box, airbag "curtain"

ALTERNATIVES

Subaru Forester Turbo S lacks rivals' executive status but is much cheaper. Impressive on road, terrific off it. Excellent all-rounder
Volvo V70 Cross Country competent all-terrain version of new, safe and sensible V70 estate with 200bhp turboed five-cylinder engine