



Audi TT Roadster



UNTIL RECENTLY, IF YOU WANTED A four-wheel drive, soft-top two-seater you had the choice of a Lamborghini Diablo Roadster and ... um, well that was it, really. But Audi has just launched a Roadster version of its TT quattro to complement the uniquely styled Coupé, so now there is a choice – just.

The two TTs were developed in parallel and indeed share all things mechanical, including the two four-cylinder, 1.8-litre engines (180 and 225bhp) and sophisticated four-wheel drive transmission. This compact version of Audi's quattro system features electro-mechanically controlled torque distribution that diverts an increasing amount of drive to the wheels with the greatest grip when any slip is detected.

You may not be aware of the techno wizardry going on behind the scenes, but you'll certainly know that there's terrific grip at each corner, whether it's from a dropped-clutch take-off or rushing through tight turns with plenty of power on – as we experienced at Goodwood. It's a car that revels in rapid, roll-free cornering and, aided by traction control, simply goes where it's pointed if treated with respect.

In unfavourable conditions, its high-speed lift-off oversteer has resulted in cases of German customers indulging in some serious off-roading. This has led to suspension changes and the addition of a rear spoiler. The

Roadsters we drove – like those TTs already sold and yet to be retro-modified – had not received such treatment, but drive with your brain fully engaged and they display tremendous roadholding and handle with perfect propriety. The other impressive thing is that, thanks to substantial body stiffening and reinforcements, there's an almost complete absence of scuttle shake on this flip-top flyer. Only on rough roads is there an occasional quiver.

We noted in our Coupé report back in May that the 180bhp turbocharged engine doesn't feel particularly fast or refined, but this time we sampled the dual-intercooled, large-turboed 225bhp version. While still not as silky or bottom-end torquey as a really good six, it certainly put pep into the performance, particularly from 3500rpm, with 0-60mph in about 6½sec and at a top speed just short of 150mph. A six-speed gearbox is standard on this model, with top pulling a comfortably long-legged 25mph per 1000rpm for easy cruising.

November isn't the ideal time for rag-top roistering, but the Roadster shrugs off winter chills with a superb electrically operated, snugly fitting hood that retracts at the touch of a button in just 15sec. (Clipping the cover into place is more of a chore, though.) After that, wind-in-the-hair motoring doesn't come much more civilised than this, with heated seats and electronic climate control keeping the cold at bay, while a

toughened glass pane behind the occupants can be powered up to tame the worst of back draughts. Two tubular aluminium hoops are fixed behind the seats to provide roll-over protection.

Billow-resistant and low in wind noise though the hood is (it also boasts a heated glass window), it makes the interior gloomy and claustrophobic, with additional blind spots making life more awkward for the driver.

The beautifully finished interior trim is highlighted by polished aluminium detailing on the gear lever, ventilation outlets, steering wheel and radio cover. And if you so desire, you can specify boldly stitched "baseball glove" leather upholstery. Other items of equipment on the 225bhp Roadster include 17in alloys with 225/45ZR tyres, twin exhaust tailpipes, xenon headlamps with

electric washers and a driver's information system that would be a lot easier to read if its numerals weren't red.

VERDICT

Although the TT appears to major on style, beneath those striking, double-take looks there's a hugely enjoyable sports car with exhilarating performance (particularly with that 225bhp engine), alert handling and tenacious roadholding. And, of course, with the Roadster there's a breath of fresh air for al fresco addicts when the claustrophobic hood is folded away behind the civilised cockpit. It also looks and feels beautifully put together with almost clinical precision and attention to detail. Athletic and aesthetic sums up the TT – so good they named it twice.

FACTS AND FIGURES

BODY

Style	two-door, two-seater convertible
Length x width	404 x 177cm (186 with mirrors)
Trim levels	one only

ENGINES

Type and size	transverse four in line; 1781cc
Power (bhp/rpm)	180/5500 or 225/5900
Torque (lb ft/rpm)	173/from 1950 206/from 2200
Valves	twin overhead camshafts actuating five valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets
Fuel system	electronic petrol injection with turbocharger and intercooler (two intercoolers on 225bhp version); 62-litre fuel tank

TRANSMISSION

Type	five-speed manual (six-speed on 225bhp version). Permanent four-wheel drive with computer-controlled hydraulic apportionment and electronic differential lock (EDL) traction control. (Electronic stability program (ESP) fitted from mid-December)
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CHASSIS

Suspension	front: MacPherson damper/struts with integral coil springs and an anti-roll bar rear: independent coil springs with trailing and transverse links and an anti-roll bar
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance
Wheels	alloy 205/55R16 tyres on 180bhp version alloy 225/45R17 on 225bhp version
Brakes	ventilated discs front, solid discs rear with vacuum servo; electronic anti-lock (ABS) and brake force distribution (EBD) both standard

