Audi A2

Featured model: 1.4SE

LIKE SCARCE INNER CITY LAND, congested roads make a build-'em-tall approach a sensible solution for town cars. They're easier to enter, give a good view and find more space vertically, so parking space is less problematic.

Of course, VW Group has also got the larger "conventional" supermini (Skoda Fabia) in its portfolio, so letting Audi do its own thing with the A2 is a good way to hedge its bets.

A bit bigger than the arch rival from Mercedes-Benz, the A2 totes some technical tricks beneath its unusual looks. It's the first all-aluminium, space-frame-built small car destined for volume production; Audi claims this saves 150kg compared with a steel monocoque body. This, plus class-leading aerodynamics, means that less power is needed to propel the A2, in the manner to which we have all grown accustomed – with potential fuel and pollution reductions, too.

Not that you'll see much of the A2's under-bonnet gizmos. You *can* remove the bonnet, but the interior release merely opens a dummy grille flap to reveal the dipstick and fluid fillers; "fit and forget" takes on a new meaning, especially as there's no spare wheel at the other end, either.

The other departure is on view inside; the rear footwells are significantly lower than the front ones – to the benefit of rear legroom.

So much for theory, yet in practice there are snags. For instance, our 1.4SE test car weighed in, with standard UK spec, at 100kg more than Audi has been claiming in its sales pitch. This puts the kerb weight midway between the Polo and Fabia fitted with the same engine, so our merely-respectable performance and economy figures should come as no surprise.

To its credit, the A2 drives very smoothly and feels a class-act around town, but another snag is that, once you exceed 60mph or meet the typical British secondary surface (that doesn't seem to exist in Germany), the mini-executive image begins to evaporate. Still, it does corner with both rapidity and stability, thanks to standard electronic stability control. (Would this have been standard A2 kit if the Merc A-Class and Audi TT handling problems hadn't arisen?).

Even so, there are some omissions to the equipment on this expensive small car: no heated door mirrors, no load cover, air conditioning or sunroof on the Standard model, and metallic paint at a very expensive premium, for example.

VERDICT

When is somebody going to produce a taller-build, semi-MPV city car that also drives quietly on the motorway and rides poor roads well? We think (we hope) the A2's 1.4 diesel version may fit the first requirement, but we're still waiting on the second. When buyers pay £8000 for a Suzuki Wagon R et al, these shortcomings matter less. But for Mondeo money, they have higher expectations.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	✪✪✪○○
Space/practicality	✪✪✪○○
Controls/displays	✪✪✪✪○
Safety	✪✪✪○○
Handling/steering	✪✪✪✪○
Comfort	✪✪○○○
Fuel economy	✪✪✪○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1390cc, 4 cylinder, petrol; 75bhp at 5000rpm, 93 lb ft at 3800rpm; belt-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.5 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.0 in 4th
suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs; gas-filled telescopic dampers
steering hydraulic power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.5m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.4m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with standard anti-skid, traction and cornering stability controls
wheels/tyres 5½in alloy with 175/60R15V tyres (6in alloy with 185/50R16V on test car); no spare – electric pump with aerosol sealant

LIKES ...

soft-lined facia storage shelf
well protected door sills/easy entry
"clean-hands" fluid level checks
standard first-aid kit/triangle

and GRIPES

spoiler dissects interior mirror image
a puncture could prove expensive
gap at seat base when cushion adjusted
hefty price of SE/optional extras

THE A2 RANGE

type and size MPV style (premium priced) supermini
trim levels standard, SE
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/75bhp; diesel: 4/1.4/75
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (no automatic available)

more facts and figures ⇨

OVERTAKING ABILITY ✪✪✪○○

Pulls smoothly from lower engine speeds, but not particularly lively unless revved – when it sounds brash. Light, precise gears, but accelerator rather "sudden" when pulling away from rest

acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④th gear	⑤th gear
20-40mph	3.5	9.1	13.1
30-50mph	4.6	9.0	13.0
40-60mph	6.0	9.1	13.6
50-70mph	7.7	9.6	14.7
30-70mph	**12.3**	**18.6**	**27.7**

max speed in each gear *(*using 5300rpm for best acceleration)*

gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	26½	44	66½	90	108

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ✪✪✪○○

Deep, recessed rear floor produces remarkable legroom, but only for two – there's a prominent centre hump. Seat folding/removal a chore and deep load depth due to absent spare

in centimetres (5-door semi-MPV)

outside	
length	383
width - *inc mirrors*	187
- *mirrors folded*	172
height	155
load sill height	10/
(inside/outside)	27
steering	
turns lock-to-lock	2.9
turning circle *(metres)*	10.5
easy to park/garage?	✪✪✪✪○

** back seat removed*

inside	*(† without sunroof)*	
front	- legroom	88-111
	- headroom	96-102†
rear	- typical leg/ kneeroom	102/ 72
	- headroom	94
	- hiproom	124
load space *(with/without spare)*		
(litres/cu ft)	*250:8.7/350:12.4*	
load length	54-104(123*)	
full length to facia	214	
load width	91-107	
load height *(to blind)*	47/67	
(to top of aperture)	75/95	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ✪✪✪✪○

Nice driving position but prominent screen pillars and wiper sweep cause vision problems. Good to reverse and exudes refinement in town use. Clear displays and easy entry/exit

SAFETY ✪✪✪○○

Brakes' best stop needs a hard push, but fine in everyday driving. Active (electronic) safety features work well, and give stable cornering. Injury prevention looks good, too

braking	
pedal feel	✪✪✪○○
in emergency	✪✪○○○
handbrake	✪✪✪○○

dry road stopping distance *from 50mph (with standard ABS)*

pedal load	distance
10kg	32½m
27kg	28½m
45kg	**26m *best stop***

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS

A2 not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES

central locking	✓	alarm	✓
remote control	✓	immobiliser	✓
auto window closure	✓	luggage security	✪✪✪○○
deadlocks	×		

✓ *standard* 0 *factory option* × not available

HANDLING AND STEERING ✪✪✪✪○

Cornering more composed than Merc's A-Class, with more assured, alert steering. Plenty of grip on low-profile tyres

COMFORT ✪✪○○○

Suspension/tyres (especially on this SE) flatter handling at the expense of ride comfort – too jerky and unsettled. Smooth and quiet engine to 60mph, but boisterous growl beyond.

FUEL ECONOMY ✪✪✪○○

The sales pitch promises ultra-low weight, ultra-low consumption, but this fully-klitted SE doesn't deliver either – see text. Cheapest tax band, though, and an easiy filler with adequate range

AA test results *(mpg)*	
worst (hard/urban)	30
best (gentle/rural)	52
overall mpg on test	**43½**
realistic tank capacity	30 litres
typical range	290 miles

official figures *(mpg)*	
urban	34.5
extra urban	60.1
combined	**47.1**
CO_2 emissions	144g/km
car tax band	A

HOW THE AUDI A2 COMPARES

	engine cyl/cap/power (no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes – best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
AUDI A2 1.4 SE	**4/1390/75**	**3250**	**12.3**	**27.7/18.6**	**43½**	**26/45***	**111**	**102/72**	**2.9/10.5**	**383**
Mercedes Benz A 140	4/1397/82	3025	13.3	36.4/23.3	37	25/25*	110	97/71	3.7/10.65	358
Toyota Yaris Verso 1.3	4/1299/85	3700	12.0	25.8/19.0	42	25½/15	107	98/78	3.2/10.5	386
Mazda Demio 1.3	4/1323/72	3450	14.4	32.1/24.0	39½	25/14	104	105/70	3.1/9.6	381
Mitsubishi Space Star 1.8	4/1834/121	3150	10.6	27.1/20.4	38	27½/18*	109	103/75	3.1/10.0	403
Suzuki Ignis 1.3	4/1328/82	3530	10.9	30.5/21.7	44	27½/12	105	100/66	3.2/10.35	361

*with ABS

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