

Audi A2

Featured model: 1.4 TDi SE



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 also has larger "conventional" superminis in its portfolio, so letting Audi do its own thing with the A2 is a good way to hedge its bets.

In its own small way, the A2 is a real technical *tour de force*. All-aluminium panelwork is attached to a space-frame structure and the tall body is nevertheless aerodynamically efficient as well as potentially weight-saving. There's no real bonnet to open for level checks – just an inspection hatch. In any case, mechanical access is a job for the dealer only. Even a spare wheel is a "reluctant" no-cost option that seriously intrudes on boot space.

Inside the cabin, the rear footwells are low yet the seat cushions are higher than usual – not easy for the less agile, but it gives loads of legroom once two passengers are in; a third is really out of the question, though.

Up front, the floor is closer to the high-set seat cushions, but the MPV-style control layout is commanding and comfortable.

In general then, this unconventional alternative to your usual, run-of-the-mill supermini, offers some real showroom advantages. The disappointments emerge when you stop looking and start driving.

Our SE test car's kerb weight proved to be more than the 990kg Audi has been claiming, so the perky three-pot diesel's performance and economy show little advantage over other similarly powered VW products. Neither is its installation as successful as in the Polo or Lupo/Arosa, with some harshness at lower revs when pulling – up to 40mph in top.

Perhaps the A2's biggest disappointment is in its bump reaction; like so many German products developed for their smooth roads, the A2 takes turbulent exception to some second-rate surfaces here in the UK.

The "on-the-road" price of our test car was over £16,000 and there's still metallic paint to add, plus other options that seem to cost more than on superminis at two-thirds of the price. However, insurance is a very reasonable Group 6 and this diesel will keep you smiling in terms of taxation and fuel economy. And, of course, its body won't go rusty – ever.

VERDICT

Apart from the A-Class Merc, nothing this small costs this much. That means raised expectations all round. At present, the A2 falls short of our expectations – it isn't convenient enough or smooth enough to allow you to sit back and relish its underlying quality. Theory hasn't translated successfully into practice.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 1422cc, 3-cylinder, diesel; 75bhp at 4000rpm, 144 lb ft at 2200rpm; belt-driven single overhead camshaft, 8 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 26.1 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 20.5 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs

Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs, gas-filled 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-lock, traction and cornering stability controls

wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 185/50R16V tyres on SE test car, with temporary spare as a no-cost option

LIKES ...

soft-lined storage for oddments
well-protected door and luggage sills
standard first aid kit/warning triangle
and GRIPES

no lamp in cargo area
super lumbar adjuster costs £120 extra
back seat folding a chore
A-pillars can necessitate head weaving

THE A2 RANGE

size and type MPV style (premium-priced) supermini

trim levels standard, SE

engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.4 litre/75bhp, 4/1.6/110 (due soon) diesel: 4/1.4/75

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (no automatic available)

OVERTAKING ABILITY			☆☆☆☆		
<i>A second slower than petrol A2 from 30 to 70mph, at best, but stronger acceleration in the gears and at lower revs, too. That high gearing provokes some throbbing below 1600rpm (40+mph);</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	4.0	9.7	No		
30-50mph	4.9	6.9	12.1		
40-60mph	6.0	6.8	9.7		
50-70mph	8.3	8.2	9.8		
30-70mph	13.2	15.1	21.9		
max speed in each gear (*using 4200rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	22	39	61	86	108

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★☆☆				
<i>Deep, recessed rear floor enhances legroom for two, but makes sills/centre hump very obstructive. Same story behind – good luggage space is achieved only if (optional) spare is absent.</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door hatch)</i>				
outside		inside	(† without sunroof)	
length	383	front	- legroom	88-111
width - inc mirrors	187		- headroom	96-102†
- mirrors folded	172	rear	- typical leg/	102/
height (no roof bars)	155		kneeroom	72
load sill height	26/69		- headroom	94
(inside/outside)			- hiproom	124
steering		load space (with/without spare)		
turns lock-to-lock	2.9	(litres:cu ft)	250:8.7/350:12.4	
turning circle (metres)	10.5	load length	54-104 (123*)	
easy to park/garage?		full length to fascia	214	
	★★★★	load width	91-107	
		load height (to blind)	48/67	
		(to top of aperture)	74/95	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★☆☆				
<i>Nice driving position and clear displays. Highish seat makes it easy to enter up front and reversing is easy too; front screen pillars can be obstructive, though</i>				
				

HOW THE A2 1.4TDi 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 TDi	3/1422/75	2680	13.2	21.9/15.1	60	25½/41*	111	102/72	2.9/10.5	383
Seat Arosa 1.4 TDi	3/1422/75	2630	12.7	21.3/14.6	62	26½/18	105	91/66	2.9/10.0	355
Vauxhall Corsa 1.7 TDi	4/1686/75	2850	12.7	22.8/16.3	57	24/14*	106	95/70	2.9/10.3	382
Skoda Fabia 1.9 TDi	4/1896/100	2360	10.3	20.1/13.5	55	24½/27*	109	100/72	2.8/10.3	396
Peugeot 206 D Turbo	4/1997/90	2600	11.4	19.8/14.4	52	26½/8	108	94/66	3.3/10.1	384
Mercedes-Benz A170 CDi (LWB)	4/1689/95	2630	12.1	26.1/17.5	53	25/30*	112	110/87	3.7/11.3	378
* with ABS										

SAFETY ★★☆☆				
<i>Brakes' emergency best stop needs a hard push, yet check-braking quite light. Active (electronic) handling control maintains cornering composure; injury prevention thorough, as well</i>				
braking		dry road stopping distance <i>from 50mph (with standard ABS)</i>		
pedal feel	★★★★	pedal load	distance	
in emergency	★★★☆☆	unhurried 10kg	34m	
handbrake	★★☆☆	sudden 41kg	25½m best stop	
		+4kg ie 45kg	26m	

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 ★★☆☆				
<i>Generally more poised and composed than Merc A-Class, but a Fabia outclasses both. Plenty of grip on low-profile tyres and electronics ensure ultimate stability.</i>				
				

COMFORT ★★☆☆				
<i>Suspension puts cornering before ride – too turbulent and jerky on secondary road surfaces. This town car feels best on dual carriageways, when engine smoothes out, too; it's then quieter than petrol version</i>				

FUEL ECONOMY ★★☆☆				
<i>Again, the A2 you buy turns out to be 130kg heavier than the sales pitch suggests; mpg not quite in Lupo/Arosa class, but still in premier league, with low tax levy. Easy filler</i>				
type of use (air conditioning off)	AA test (mpg)			
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	39			
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	49			
motorway (70mph cruising)	56			
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	64			
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	72			
typical mpg overall	60			
realistic tank capacity/range	30 litres/395 miles			
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	49.5/78.5/64.2			
CO ₂ emissions 119g/km	car tax band A			