

FIRST  
DRIVE

## Audi A4 Avant



## AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Controls/displays	★★★★○
Handling/steering	★★★★○
Comfort	★★★○○
Space/practicality	★★★★○

## THE A4 AVANT RANGE

**size and type** upper-medium (premium-priced) estate car

**trim levels** standard, with SE and Sport trim/equipment option packs

**engines** petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/102bhp, 4/1.8T/150, 4/2.0/130, V6/2.4/170, V6/3.0/220. Diesel (all Turbo Di) 4/1.9/130, V6/2.5/155, V6/2.5/180

**drive** 2- and 4-wheel drive, 5- and 6-speed manual (Multitronic continuously variable or Tiptronic stepped automatic)

**notable features** new 220 bhp petrol V6 with 2- or 4-wheel drive, two-level load floor and two-level tailgate opening, chilled facia stowage box

## VITAL STATISTICS (cm)

<b>length x width (folded mirrors)</b>	455x177
<b>front</b> - legroom	88-112
- headroom ( <i>no sunroof</i> )	94-102
<b>rear</b> - typical legroom	97
- typical kneeroom	70
- headroom	93
- hiproom	129-136
<b>load space (all seats in use)</b> (litres/cu ft)	400/14.2
<b>load length (seats up/folded)</b>	94/173
<b>load width</b>	even 100
<b>load sill height (inside/outside)*</b>	4/66
<b>boot/load aperture height*</b>	42/70
*(+16 with floor removed)	

## LIKES ...

commendable wind sealing  
three-pulse lane-change indicators  
lumbar adjuster for height and thrust  
full-size spare wheel for UK cars  
easy-access warning triangle

## and GRIPES

rear cushions don't tilt or remove  
no bumper nudge protectors  
obstructive centre rear tunnel  
under-seat drawers reduce rear legroom

**W**HEN IT COMES TO THE A4 (and A6), Audi doesn't offer a hatchback; it's a four-door saloon or an estate car for the prospective owner. But then, that's more or less the same choice as you get with a BMW 3-Series, a C-Class Mercedes-Benz and a Volvo S60/V70. Is having a hatch too plebian?

To Audi, "estate car" is almost a dirty word, however – it much prefers "Avant" to describe its holdall. This formula has been highly successful in the market-place in the previous version's five-year life, with sales outstripping all its premium-priced rivals.

The trick is to offer reasonable (though nothing special) load volume in a high-style package, with more adaptability than a saloon with fixed seats. Nothing is allowed to undermine the Avant's looks and interior ambience. The latest model makes one new concession to grubbiness, however – the carpeted load deck can be folded (or removed entirely) to reveal a two-level plastic underfloor area; this enhances load depth by a further 16cm, as well.

The tailgate opens to two positions, to help the tall find headroom and the short to reach the grab-handle. The almost flat sill and regular load width look inviting, until you realise that rivals' minimum width (between the wheelarches) is at least as good. There's a useful set of hinged side compartments, though, and the 60/40 split backrest also incorporates a ski-flap and cup-holders within the centre folding armrest. To accommodate longer loads, this backrest flips forwards to rest on the

one-piece fixed cushion. This means that the extended load space isn't quite flat and you need to use the lashing eyes to protect front occupants from sliding cargo.

Up front, the Avant is indistinguishable from the saloon, with high-quality yet eminently practical fittings and furnishings. The Avant's insulation from wind noise and body fretting can be taken for granted.

We drove the non-sports-pack version this time and found its (unladen) ride still on the firm side, so would strongly recommend all A4 buyers to think twice about paying extra for this pack.

Deft handling and firm but precise steering with alert cornering response come as standard, though we're still inclined to think that the inevitable compromise between ride and handling isn't as craftily contrived as in the best of the mid-priced alternatives – albeit with a less prestigious image.

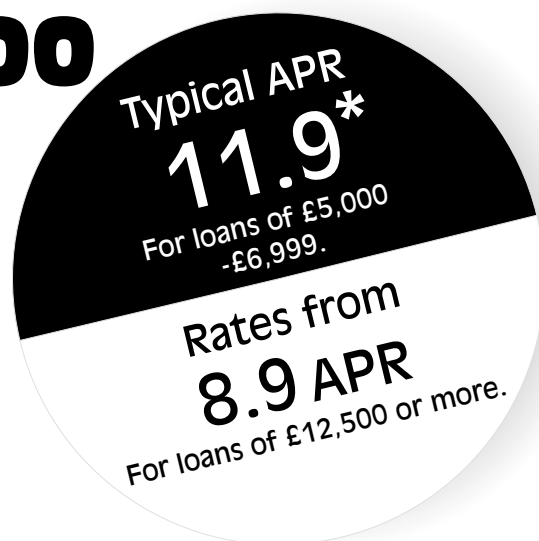
## VERDICT

"Higher quality, loftier image", seems to sum up the reason for the A4's success, and we see no reason to doubt that this latest Avant will continue the success story. Whatever one's reasons for paying the extra, sheer space shouldn't be one of them – though it beats the A4 saloon for domesticity. Those V6 engines do offer something special, however, with the 1.8 Turbo petrol as a sensible lower-cost alternative. Once you've paid up front, you're unlikely to be disappointed.



Car  
Loans

# For less than **£135** a month you could have **£5,000** to get your next car.



## What are you waiting for?

Call AA Car Loans today and choose from our wide range of competitive motor finance options. And because we're AA Car Loans, we can help arrange breakdown cover for you. We can even investigate your chosen car's history and, what's more, you'll also get a FREE AA Car Buyer Inspection worth £99.<sup>#</sup>

So call 0800 60 50 30<sup>†</sup> today. What's stopping you?

\* Telephone calls may be recorded for security purposes and monitored under our quality control procedures. You may now make calls using a textphone. Information is available in Large Print, Audio and Braille on request. Please call for details. Any information provided by you may be used by Centrica Personal Finance Limited ("CPFL"), the Centrica plc Group (including those using the British Gas, Scottish Gas, Goldfish and AA brands) and authorised users of CPFL for marketing (by post, telephone, e-mail or fax), credit scoring and other purposes. If you do not want these details to be used for marketing, please inform CPFL in writing. AA Loans are provided or arranged, subject to status, by Centrica Personal Finance Limited, City House, City Road, Chester CH88 3AN. Written quotations are available on request. You must be at least 18 and a UK resident (excluding the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) to apply. The APR will vary depending on the amount of your loan. APR and repayment details are correct at the time of print. Certain purposes of loan may be excluded or have limited repayment periods; please ring for details. The rate you are offered will depend on credit assessment procedures, your personal circumstances and other related factors. #Once your car finance agreement has been finalised, you can claim your one FREE AA Car Buyer Inspection (Standard Check) worth £99. \*Typical Example: For a loan of £5,000 repayable by Direct Debit over 4 years, your monthly repayments would be 48 of £132.53 commencing three months after your loan cheque is issued. Total amount repayable would be £6,361.44, 11.9APR. Rate Bands: £1,000 - £2,999 16.9APR; £3,000 - £4,999 13.9APR; £5,000 - £6,999 11.9APR; £7,000 - £12,499 10.9APR; £12,500+ 8.9APR

Apply on-line @ [www.theAA.com](http://www.theAA.com)

Call free quoting  
Response Code  
61315

**0800 60 50 30<sup>†</sup>**

Lines open 7 days a week:  
8am - 10pm Monday to Friday  
8.30am - 6pm Saturday  
9.30am - 5.30pm Sunday