



Audi A1

Small is beautiful

Review | Those looking for a compact car, usually look for an economic car. The model that offers the best value for money, will be the model of choice. However, Audi is a premium brand. That means it's not about economy, but about quality, image and refinement. Can the new Audi A1 still be a rational choice?

This is the second generation of the Audi A1. Just like with the first version, the A1 can be personalised in many ways. At the same time there's a big difference: previously the A1 was available as a three-door and five-door "Sportback") but this choice is no longer. The A1 is now always a five-door hatchback, a three-door is no longer an option.



While a three-door looks more sporty, the low nose, sharp headlights and huge grille make the new A1 still looks tougher than the previous generation. The test vehicle is relatively modest with a black roof, black A-pillars and a black grille ("black package"). Just as

easily the A1 can be dressed up with bright colours, white rims and flashy sticker sets.

Premium

Audi is a premium brand, and with the larger models this translates in abundant space, and a wealth of features. Because of the price and space this isn't possible with the A1, but Audi found an alternative to still distinguish itself. What Audi did do, is perfect every detail of the car. The seating position is better than usual, the angle between the driver's seat and the steering wheel is perfect, the A-pillar hardly affects visibility, the gear lever is pleasant to the touch and the seats have exactly the right shapes in the right places. These are all small things where Audi offers just a bit more than other brands. All these little things together make the driver feel more at home than in other compact cars.

"The A1 certainly is more expensive than other compact cars, but this test drive makes it obvious why"



On top of that, the A1 offers the usual immaculate build quality and high quality materials. For example, the dashboard of the test car has been upholstered with a material that can best be described as freestyle kevlar. Other parts are shiny black and that causes has a weird problem: these little panels reflect light and when it's raining outside, the rain drops seems to dance on the dash and which is distracting to the driver. And the A1 has a few other minor faults: the rear windows do not open completely and in bad weather the rear window attracts so much dirt that the wiper works overtime.

Space and specs

The A1 offers many creature comforts as long as the right boxes have been ticked. The A1 comes with a digital instrument cluster as standard, so that the driver can decide how and where data is shown. Just like with the more expensive models, the map for the satnav can be projected behind the steering wheel between the speedometer and rev counter.

The optional infotainment system can show satellite images from Google Earth on top of the maps to make navigating even easier. As an alternative, the driver's smartphone can be used with Apple CarPlay or Android Auto. Very smart: the A1 has both a USB A and USB C connector. In this way the car is ready for the future, yet no adapter cable is required with older equipment. The audio system has a peculiarity. The standard system offers a richer and fuller sound than the optional, high end B&O system. The latter does have a more detailed sound, but it is so flat that most

people will prefer the basic audio.



Compared to the previous A1 the wheelbase has increased by 9 cm. This difference is most noticeable on the rear seat. Also, the backsides of the front seats are soft, so adults can sit comfortably in the rear of the A1. The boot space has increased as well and now measures 335 litres; a fair value for a car in this segment.

30 TFSI

How the A1 handles, strongly depends on the chosen version. The A1 can be fitted with engines ranging from 90 to 200 PS, with and without adaptive suspension. The "30 TFSI" is expected to be the most popular choice. This is a 1.0 litre three-cylinder engine that develops 116 PS / 200 Nm. Even at low revs the engine is torque strong. Together with the bite-happy clutch this gives the car a lively disposition. Again this is an example of how Audi offers more than average: the way the clutch responds and the way the engine revs up give the car more refinement. Also, the six-speed manual gives the feeling that each and every cog works in perfect harmony with the other.



In efficient mode the 30 TFSI is comfortable. In dynamic mode the three-cylinder is eager to rev and this gives it a very sporty character indeed. Even when driving quickly fuel economy is decent. The test drive took place in a mountainous area (see photos), yet the car consumed 5.2 litres per 100 km (54 mpg).

The base engine was combined with the base suspension. And again: even in this set-up the A1 is more refined than the average compact car. The A1 feels firm and stable and the driver feels what's going on under the front wheels via the steering wheel. Other compact cars offer a similar stable and reassuring feel but appear to be heavy and massive, yet the A1 is light-footed. On bad road surfaces it's noticeable how advanced the underpinning really is: bumps and holes in the road hardly affect the A1. The A1 doesn't differ from other compact cars when it comes to driving noise. The three-cylinder sound as well as noise from the tyres and wind are just as audible as with less prestigious brands. The reason is simple: sound insulation makes a car heavier (and expensive!) and the A1 partly owes its excellent handling to its modest weight.



40 TFSI

When writing, the top model is the "40 TFSI", which means a 2.0 litre four-cylinder engine that delivers 200 PS / 320 Nm. It comes with a seven speed automatic with dual clutch ("S-Tronic") as standard. When driving calmly, the difference with the base engine is small. While the 30 TFSI feels spritely, in the end the 40 TFSI can deliver a bigger blow. When putting the pedal to the metal, the 40 TFSI is a seriously quick car that can even outperform (much) bigger cars with ease.

The gearbox ratios and the way the engine revs and builds up power are perfectly matched, which means the 40 TFSI is comfortable on long distances and mildly explosive on request. Regrettably, this time, fuel economy isn't favourable: a drive on the same route as the 30 TFSI took 7.5 litres per 100 km (37 mpg) with the 40 TFSI and that is too much, even considering the impressive performance. Also: this poor fuel economy means the range is limited to less than 400 km, so modern electric cars have a larger range on a full "tank".

The bigger engine puts more weight on the front wheels, which means the balance in the car differs from the base model. Also, this second vehicle was

fitted with adaptive suspension. In standard mode this offers much more comfort, while handling is more sporty in dynamic mode. The light-footed character has been replaced by a more mature character, as if this is a much bigger car.



Conclusion

Is the Audi A1 all about image and emotion, or is it also a rational choice? In a way, it can be both. The A1 certainly is more expensive than other compact cars, but this test drive makes it obvious why. And it isn't just about the name. In all fields the Audi A1 offers more than a basic car. This starts with the seating position, build quality and finishing. The real strength is in the engine, the fuel saving technologies (30 TFSI, not 40 TFSI) and safety levels. The A1 only lags behind when it comes to sound insulation. Also, the A1 has some teething problems like rear windows that don't fully open, reflections on the dashboard and a rear window that seems to attract dirt.

The 40 TFSI is expensive to buy and run. The 30 TFSI isn't as strong, but thanks to its lively disposition it feels just as quick and this makes it the smarter choice. Many will choose the base audio system over the fragile sound of the B&O system. In short: the differences are in the details and this isn't noticeable when doing a short test drive around the block. So, ask for a lengthy test drive and enjoy! ■



Specifications

Audi A1 30 TFSI

Size and weight



Length x width x height	403 x 174 x 141 cm
Wheelbase	256 cm
Kerb weight	1.180 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	40 l
Luggage space	335/1090 l
Tyre size	185/65R15

Engine and performance



Capacity	999 cc
Cylinders / valves	3/2
Max power	116 PS @ 5000 rpm
Max torque	200 Nm @ 2000 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	9.5 secs
Top speed	203 km/h
Average mileage	4.9 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	6 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.2 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	108 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 18,285
Price base model	Â£ 17,445