



Audi Q3

A perfectionist's dream

Review | An SUV is chosen as an alternative to a traditional saloon or family hatchback. A "Sports Utility Vehicle" is preferred for its functionality, but mostly to be different. And that's why every carmaker has its own interpretation of this concept. How does Audi distinguish itself with the second generation of the Q3?

The answer to that question becomes apparent the moment one lays eyes on the 2018 Q3. For many brands an SUV should be tough looking, adventurous and invincible. They opt for tense lines, broad shoulders and a muscular rear. Audi on the other hand, chooses simple, well-chosen lines. One clear and well-defined stroke makes the Q3 elegant and timeless. That may make this SUV less tough looking, but the tall bodywork and piercing look of the headlights still makes it look self-confident.



Space

On the inside there isn't a trace of adventure. The Q3 does not feature big braces, a compass, easy wash material, mounts for a jet ski or anything like that. The cabin of the Q3 is as refined and luxurious as that of any other modern Audi. Again, it's not about the rough outdoor life but rather about beauty.

The space in the front is good, but the Q3 doesn't offer a particularly high seating position. A mighty feeling, that other cars in this segment often do offer, is lacking as well. The Q3 is noticeably taller and larger than the average hatchback in this price class, but that's all. Both head and legroom in the rear are fine, also because the back seat is mounted on rails. The boot is of above average size for a car of this size, and to make loading and unloading even easier a power tailgate is available as an option.

"The combination of a tall body, advanced mechanics and modern electronics doesn't just make everything possible, it makes everything easy"



Specs

Typical for the new generation of Audi's, is that the technology from the top model (the Audi A8) is available on the everyday models. That's why the Q3 comes with a Virtual Cockpit. This means that the dials (speedometer and rev counter) have been replaced by a big display. A second display, mounted centrally on the dashboard, replaces most of the buttons. This makes for a cleaner dashboard and it allows the driver to decide which data is shown in which way. Driving the Q3 proves this is more than just a gadget because the car is actually more suited to the preferences of the driver.

For years Audi infotainment was controlled by a rotating knob. A touch screen was said to get dirty easily and offer less picture quality. With the new generation of cars changed it's mind and finally offers a touch screen. This doesn't just make more sense, it also makes the use of Apple Carplay and Android Auto much more intuitive. Additionally Audi offers "natural speech recognition". Although the name implies so, this isn't a smart assistant that uses artificial intelligence. Instead, it's merely a system that recognises set keywords in a random order. Optionally, the Q3 can be fitted with a high-end audio system by B&O. The sound quality is well balanced, clear and faultless.

Of course the Q3 can be fitted with self-driving functions. A computer looks ahead with the driver and will warn for danger or even act when necessary. While test driving, this worked as it should: these

systems never affect driving quality and only act when really necessary.

Driving

Audi is a so-called "premium" brand and that doesn't merely mean more attention to detail and high-quality materials, it also means more refined technology. The underpinning is a clear proof of this. Because of the tall bodywork and high centre of gravity an SUV doesn't handle as well as a traditional, low hatchback. However, the Q3 has such advanced suspension (including Quattro four-wheel drive), that it doesn't just handle well it even makes things easier. Even without the driver noticing, the Q3 is outperforming(much) faster cars, even on twisty roads.



To improve comfort, the distance between the driver and the mechanics has been made as big as possible. Using "Audi Drive Select" one can choose a comfortable, dynamic or economic character. However, in real life the differences between these modes are small and focus is always on comfort. To put this in perspective: the dynamic mode of the Q3 would be comfort mode in some other SUVs. In automatic mode Drive Select chooses the appropriate mode based on the driving style, but this didn't always work right. More than once steering became extremely light without warning. On top of that: the brakes are very strong, but sometimes the necessary feeling is lacking to make the car stop exactly where the driver wants it to.

Performance and economy

Because the Audi Q3 isn't just chosen for practical reasons, but also for the image and the experience, the top model was been tried: the "45 TFSI". That is a 230 PS / 350 Nm strong four-cylinder petrol engine, connected to a 7-speed automatic gearbox. The most muscular version of the Q3 responds surprisingly mildly to the throttle. Also, because an exhilarating sound or a feeling of an abundance of power are lacking, the driver doesn't get the thrill that usually comes with a top model.



When pressing the pedal to the metal, the electronics and the mechanics need quite some time to execute the request. The gearbox shifts down, the engine revs up, the turbo builds up pressure, and only then the promised is power released. In theory the 45 TFSI is seriously quick (0 to 62 mph in 6.3 seconds, top speed 233 km/h), but in practice this isn't an exciting car. On the open road every sensation of speed is lacking. Again this car doesn't give the feeling of driving the top of the line version, but it does mean this is an excellent mile muncher.

After the top model, the "base model" was tested: the "35 TFSI". It does not have Quattro four-wheel drive and therefore handling is slightly less agile at high speeds. In daily traffic the 150 PS / 250 Nm strong version is as capable as the strongest variant. The 1.5 TFSI needs some time before responding to the throttle as well, but in the end performance is more than adequate. Also, it covers long distances with as much ease as the more expensive version. Expect an

average fuel economy of 6 litres per 100 km.



The 45 TFSI is more expensive to buy and run than the 35 TFSI and isn't worth that. By choosing the 35 TFSI instead, the money saved can be used on optional extras to make this (dream)car more special or even more beautiful.

Conclusion

Audi is a so-called "premium" brand. This means it makes things better and more beautiful than an average brand. This is why Audi has it's own interpretation of a mid-size SUV. Emphasis isn't on adventure or off-road worthiness, but rather on superiority. The combination of a tall body, advanced mechanics and modern electronics doesn't just make everything possible, it makes everything easy. Because the technology takes over most of the heavy lifting, everyone can drive fast with the Q3. In busy traffic, the semi-self-driving functions make the car safer.

This makes the Q3 an excellent mate for intensive daily use. But because everything is so polished and so perfect, it also makes the Q3 a tad boring. In the end, the immaculate build quality, the beautiful materials and the many personalisation options make the Q3 special. ■