

Audi A6

Featuring 2.4SE Saloon and 2.5TDi Avant



FOR TOO LONG, AUDI HAS BEEN overshadowed by Daimler-Benz and BMW in the executive car desirability stakes. However, this VW Group prestige brand has recently taken off and the A6's success is well rooted in quality build and an impressive array of power units.

Apart from this test duo, there's a bigger petrol V6 that's even swifter, but not quite as silky as the 2.4; a slower, smaller diesel offers even more fuel economy, but again can't match this new V6 TDi's remarkable mechanical refinement. There's also an impressive four-pot 1.8 Turbo which equals the V6 diesel's power output and gives eager performance and handling to match, so long as you're prepared to give it its head, all the way to 6500rpm plus.

Nevertheless, the two V6s tested here deliver their considerable verve with vibration-free effortlessness. The 2.4 also needs to spin faster to release its full acceleration, yet it's a motor that waffles affably at 25mph in top gear and is always creamy-smooth and quiet.

The diesel reveals it's a diesel first thing, but once the initial start-up/warm-up phase is past, its level of hush when cruising and freedom from vibration are

enormously impressive – especially when you remember that this is a direct-injection diesel.

OK, so the BMW equivalent may have the edge in refinement (particularly from a cold start), but our figures confirm the direct-injection advantage in fuel economy and this Audi's six-speed gearbox also contributes towards its supreme effortlessness as a main road cruiser. Yet because of the engine's massive low-speed pulling power, you can also use sixth gear at any speed above 40mph without demur. Compared with the previous A6's five-cylinder diesel, this latest uses a bit more fuel, but is quicker and both smoother and quieter.

Both manual gearchanges work well (once you're used to the sixth slot where reverse often is), but the clutch effort is too much for some. It's only too easy to forget to engage sixth gear on the diesel – fifth sounds almost as quiet on the motorway, and sometimes, because the engine is so incredibly flexible, we found that we had more intermediate ratios than we knew what to do with.

The A6's suspension has long been the model's Achilles heel – especially in terms of ride. You

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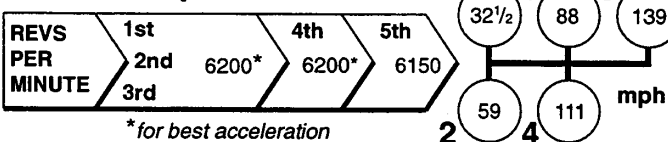
PERFORMANCE – 2.4SE SALOON

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.8	3.7	5.8	8.8
IN 5TH GEAR		5.8	11.4	16.6	21.6
IN 4TH GEAR		4.1	7.9	11.4	15.2

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		12.1/8.9		10.8/7.3	
			11.4/7.9		10.2/7.3

Maximum speeds



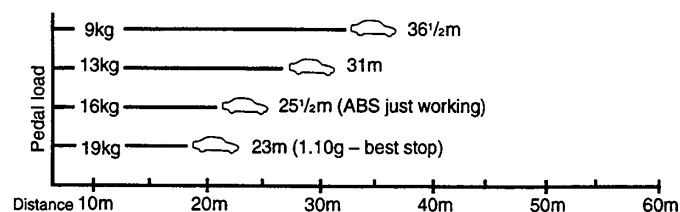
FUEL CONSUMPTION – 2.4SE

Type of use – with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	19
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	25
Motorway (70mph cruising)	33
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	30
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	35
Typical mpg overall	30½
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	60 litres/400 miles
*with air conditioning switched on, consumption will increase by 2–4% in winter and 4–8% in summer	

BRAKES – 2.4SE

Pedal feel ●●●●○ Behaviour in an emergency ●●●●● Handbrake ●●●○○

Dry road stopping distance from 50mph (with standard ABS)
(A good-to-average best stop is about 26m at 15-20kg pedal load)



Fade test: pedal load required for a moderate (34m/.75g) stop:
13kg at start of test, 14kg at end of test. (Ideal brakes show no change)

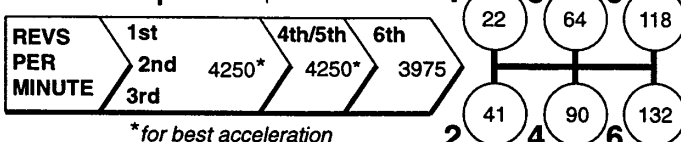
PERFORMANCE – 2.5TDi AVANT

Acceleration time in seconds

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.4	3.6	5.8	8.9
IN 6TH/5TH GEAR		8.9/5.6	14.7/9.7	19.9/13.9	25.4/18.3
IN 4TH GEAR		3.2	6.1	9.1	12.3

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
6TH/5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		22.5/14.9/8.3		11.0/8.3/5.9	
			14.7/9.7/6.1		10.7/8.6/6.2

Maximum speeds



FUEL CONSUMPTION – 2.5TDi

Type of use – with air conditioning off*	mpg
Urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	26
Suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	34
Motorway (70mph cruising) [5.5%]	47½
Cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	43
Rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start) [5%]	50
Typical mpg overall	44
Realistic tank range (not nominal tank capacity)	58 litres/560 miles
*with air conditioning switched on, consumption increased by percentages shown in brackets.	

SAFETY/SECURITY FEATURES – BOTH MODELS

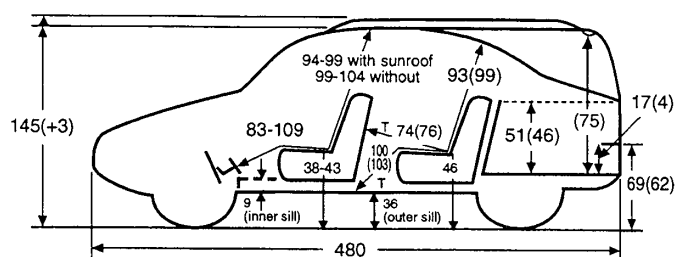
Assessed on their effectiveness and convenience
(the more black blobs the better)

Seatbelts		Door locking	●●●●○
front ●●●○○	rear ●●●●○	central locking?	☒
Head restraints		remote control?	☒
front ●●●○○	rear ●●●○○	auto window closure?	☒
Interior		deadlocks?	☒
safety padding ●●●○○		Luggage	
driver's airbag? ☒		secure from interior/hidden	●●○○○
other airbags? (3) ☒		from view	●●○○○
side impact protection ●●●○○		Alarm	●●●●○
Fuel anti-spillage	●●●○○	engine immobilised?	☒

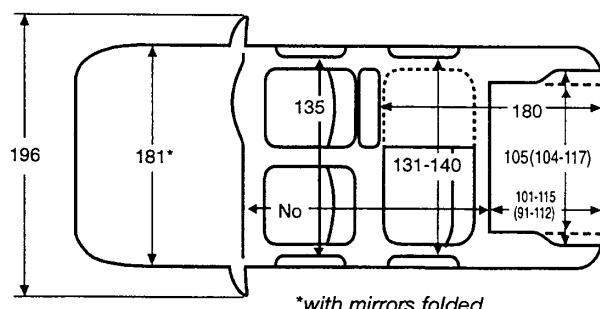
☒ standard on test car ☐ factory fitted option ☒ not available

MEASUREMENTS

Centimetres 4-door Saloon (Avant/Estate in brackets, where different)



T: *typical back seat space behind medium-sized front occupants*



certainly feel well insulated from the world outside – lateral ridges and concrete sets are well smothered – but lumpy, undulating surfaces can still induce some pitching and heaving.

One of our cars had the optional Servotronic power steering, which feels very light when parking, but the assistance fades away out on the highway. This leaves a firm weightiness with no free-play from straight-ahead that may be good for "feel" on winding roads, but renders control quite tiring on the arms, on a motorway.

We preferred the normal set-up, which shows less contrast in response, but is still accurate, backed up by standard fitment stability and traction controls; these work well to contain any nose drift on the car's cornering limits. Acting as a sort of safety curtain, the brakes are selectively actuated and the engine power curtailed, outside the driver's control, to keep things in check; you can switch it off, but on the first wet roundabout taken too fast, you'll realise how effective it is!

It's difficult to fault the brakes, except that the handbrake feels too heavy; there's no fade and the impressive emergency best stop is attained without histrionics.

Inside the cabin, the driver has less maximum legroom than some cars in this class offer, but most will find the driving position very comfortable, with good all-round vision – especially in the Avant. The displays include an impressive array of supplementary dials, and the standard features of the significantly cheaper non-SE versions leave little to be desired.

You don't get a standard sunroof (which is prone to low-speed buffeting) because full interior climate control is provided – including separate side-to-side

temperature control. It's guilty of providing too much warmth to faces and too little to feet at times, however, which causes one to resort to manual control of the system.

There are lots of useful, expandable places for oddments in all the doors, behind and under the seats and in the fascia area. The Avant takes this further by providing even more in the cargo area, plus an extra power socket and toolbox.

The saloon's folding back seat is practical enough, but once you've sampled the Avant's extra versatility, it's difficult to make any sense of doing without it, for its luggage deck's plush quality of finish is the saloon's equal, while (unusually) its back seat space and comfort are even better. In reality, this isn't a serious cargo-carrier, but a versatile five-door holdall that strikes a clever compromise between versatility and elegance.

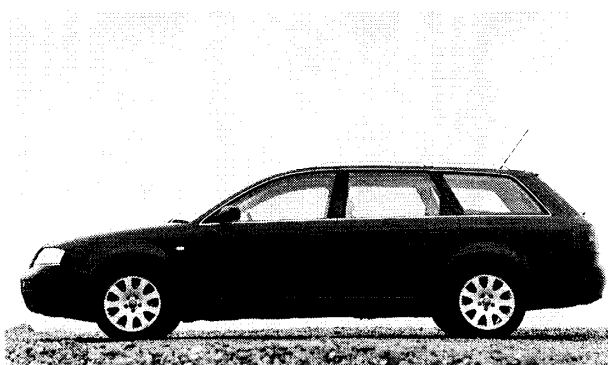
Both versions offer effective and convenient security credentials, the excellent Bose radio/cassette is so easy to work that you don't miss wheel controls and there's a choice of three different interior fabrics.

The safety features are also impressive, but for more details on how they perform, a copy of the Euro-NCAP test on the A6 is available on request.

Like most VW Group products, there's a generous 12-year anti-rust-perforation warranty, but the normal mechanical warranty is operated by the dealer for years two and three, so you're continued attendance for routine (20,000-mile) major servicing will be expected; there's a 60,000-mile limit, as well.

VERDICT

There are no really bad cars among the clutch of executive saloons currently on offer from Germany and Scandinavia. However, each contender has its particular strengths and merely so-so features. The A6 is impeccably built, comprehensively equipped at the cheapest versions' price and, between them, these two engines are hard to beat. But, it's the six-speed V6 diesel that's really the trendsetter, establishing a new benchmark for its impeccable manners and small-car fuel economy, yet providing performance that's a match for any executive express on petrol. Marry this kind of practicality to the Avant bodywork and you have something rather special.



HOW THE A6 SALOON COMPARES	Engine cyl/cap/power (cc/bhp)	Revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes† best stop (m/kg)	Maximum legroom – front (cm)	Typical leg/ kneeroom – rear (cm)	Steering turns/ circle (m)	Overall length (cm)
AUDI A6 2.4SE	V6/2393/165	3100	8.8	21.6/15.2	30½	23/19	109	100/74	2.8/11.15	480
Toyota Camry V6 (Auto)	V6/2995/188	2600	8.8	AUTO	24½	26/18	107	109/79	3.1/11.6	476
BMW 523i SE	6/2494/170	2980	8.1	24.1/16.9	30	23½/18	116	103/76	3.0/11.0	478
Mercedes Benz E240 (Auto)	V6/2398/170	2950	9.7	AUTO	26½	26/16	120	112/79	3.2/10.6	479
Saab 9-5 2.0t	4/1985/150	2350	9.5	30.7/16.3	31½	25½/32	110	103/79	2.9/11.0	482
Audi A6 2.5TDi Avant	V6/2496/150	2120(6th)	8.9	18.3/12.3	44	23/19	109	103/76	2.8/11.15	480
† all with ABS										

Likes . . . and gripes

Generous fuel tank range . . . even though warning lamp is alarmist
 Twenty courtesy lamps – no less . . . but dial dimmer and headlamp trimmer controls get confused
 Convenient handset locking . . . but no way of preventing boot access from interior
 Diesel starts instantly without “glow plug” wait . . . but it still rattles and rumbles when cold
 Lumbar adjuster not missed : no cruise control “engaged” lamp

FOR THE TECHNICAL

	2.5TDi (diesel)	2.4 (Petrol)
ENGINES		
Type	longitudinal V6 with double overhead camshafts per bank	
Size	2496cc	2393cc
Power	150bhp at 4000rpm	165bhp at 6000rpm
Torque	229 lb ft at 1500rpm	170 lb ft at 3200rpm
Fuel/ignition	direct injection turbo-diesel with intercooler, exhaust gas recirculation and oxidation catalyser. Electronically controlled mechanical injector pump 70-litre fuel tank, with low-level warning	electronic multi-point petrol injection; integrated spark timing and twin exhaust catalysers
TRANSMISSIONS		
Test cars – type	six-speed manual Optional extra five-speed Tiptronic automatic with front-wheel drive (quattro four-wheel drive version of 2.5TDi optional)	five-speed manual
Test cars – mph per 1000rpm	32.9 in 6th, 27.7 in 5th	22.6 in 5th, 17.9 in 4th
CHASSIS		
Suspension – front	four-link with upper and lower wishbones, coil springs	
– rear	torsion beam (dead) axle with trailing arms, coil springs; anti-roll bars and telescopic dampers all round	
Steering	rack and pinion with hydraulic power-assistance. Optional extra Servotronic fitted to 2.4 test car: 2.8 turns between full locks, with 11.15m turning circle between kerbs; 15.85m circle for one turn of the wheel	
Wheels	6J alloy with 205/60R15V on standard car; 7J alloy with 205/55R16Z on SE version; full-size spare	
Brakes	ventilated discs front; solid discs rear with vacuum servo. Standard electronic four-channel anti-lock control, with additional traction, braking force distribution and cornering stability controls integrated	