

High Fives

Big brothers S5 and Q7 offer plenty, but A5 and Q5 show that sometimes indeed less is more

2011 Audi A5 Cabriolet

The Audi S5 hit the market as a 2008 model and particularly caught our attention. Any S or RS quattro does. The S4 could be had with a manual transmission, but not the S6 or S8. The A4 body type is on the road in large numbers, but here was something new: half the price of an S8, with a V8 and stick, and in a sexy coupe format.

The Audi A5 was introduced at the same time, and its V6, compared with the V8, offered better fuel mileage, while its body was very close in appearance.

Then a possible tie-breaker was announced: the Audi A5 Cabriolet with quattro all-wheel drive (there is also a front-drive version). With its distinctive coupe roofline chopped off, it looked less the 5, most readily distinguished at a glance by its two doors versus the 4's four.

Joe Sage

Was this a waste of a great concept? No. The price point and features of the A5 still bring a lot to the table.

The Audi S5 quattro coupe still has its original powerful and throaty 4.2L V8, with 354 hp and 325 lb-ft of torque at 3500 RPM. The A5 quattro coupe now has a turbocharged intercooled inline-4 with just 211 hp but 258 lb-ft of torque (and at higher RPMs, 4200-5100). The S5 coupe states fuel economy of 16/24 with Tiptronic or 14/22 with 6-speed manual, city/highway, while the new A5 coupe promises 21/29 Tiptronic or 21/31 manual. With the additional weight of a convertible (about 350 pounds), the A5 Cabriolet comes in at 21/29.

Against the S5, the A5 has about 25-37 percent better fuel mileage but 40 percent lower horsepower (though just 20 percent lower torque). S5 0-to-60 time is

4.9 seconds (manual or Tiptronic). The A5 coupe clocks at 6.4 manual or 6.7 Tiptronic, while the A5 Cabriolet quattro (Tiptronic only) hits it in 7.5.

The A5 coupe has a base price of \$36,900 (in Premium, the lowest of three base packages), the A5 Cabriolet \$42,000 and the S5 \$53,650. Typically enough, the more you add to the A5, the closer it gets to the already more heavily loaded S5. But the base comparison is about a 28-45 percent premium for the S5 over the A5.

We've spent quite a bit of time with the Audi S5. Bottom line, it's a beautiful coupe, well-appointed inside and out, has V8 power and the sound effects to go with it, has an available manual transmission, but comes with a gas guzzler tax for a reason: our average over long term testing was about 11 MPG. The manual trans-



Audi S5 Coupe and A5 Cabriolet



mission is great, but if you're going to drive in 6th gear to save gas, what's the point? We were very interested in the A5. (Jumping ahead, we averaged about 14 MPG in one full tank with the A5. Okay, none of these have fuel economy as their prime directive.)

Our week with the A5 Cabriolet revealed a real winner. Despite many prior miles in the S5, we generally didn't feel we were lacking for power. The S5's V8 sound effects are great, but not essential. The convertible top is so tight-fitting and so well insulated, with the top up you can forget you're in a ragtop: no motion, no noise. The shape isn't as elegant as the steel-topped coupe, but it's more elegant than many other convertibles. The top goes down in about 15 seconds, our gold standard. It's a hair under 18 seconds to put back up (plus about 2.5 more to bring the windows up, after that).

We liked the A5 so well, we started to bargain with ourselves about living without the option of a manual transmission, otherwise our preference. We'd noted that when we slow to turn fairly aggressively at an intersection, the power drops and then surges. As we were now rationalizing the automatic, we decided that may be a good thing: you're back on top of your power as soon as you get through the corner. But then we find ourselves behind a slow truck, check the mirror, change lanes, give it gas... and wait... and it surges. More masterful application of the Tiptronic could probably conquer this.

So that's settled. We loved the A5. We didn't lack for power, despite the numeric difference on paper. The higher torque ratio may have helped a lot. It may have been partly the Brilliant Red paint and black leather, but we didn't find ourselves lacking for presence among our peers. We wish it came with a manual.

But... what if they were to bring out an S5 (or RS5) with a manual transmission and all that horsepower, maybe with a twin turbo V6? What if? Well, the S5 is a low-volume vehicle, so changes come in stages. Now available is an S5 Cabriolet, indeed equipped with a smaller engine, a 3.0L V6 with dual intercoolers and supercharger. Horsepower drops just a little, to 333, while torque remains 325 lb-ft. 0-to-60 time is 5.2 seconds. But it comes only as a Tiptronic. Base price is \$59,050 (or \$64,950 as Prestige). So there's our final irony, or perhaps ultimate conclusion: driving the A5 Tiptronic, we got at least 50 percent comfortable with the idea of forgoing the manual. Now we have the S5 Cabriolet that might have solved all this, but it's pricey and automatic-only. If cost is less important and you prefer the automatic, check out the S5 Cabriolet. It loses a little power and V8 rumble, but gains fuel mileage on a par with the A5 (21/29). If you like to drive a stick, and if you like to save some dough, the A5 quattro Cabriolet has a 30 percent lower price than the S5 Cabriolet. Tough as it might be to lose the S designation, we think that's where we'd end up. And yeah, we kind of like the red over black. ■

2011 Audi Q5 2.0T quattro

We drove and reviewed the all-new Audi Q5 in May/June 2009 and again a year later. We had driven the Audi Q7 at its launch, impressing us on extremely rough forest roads and high-speed mountain highways worthy of a sports car. The Q5 turns out to be more than just a downsized Q7. Unless you need the specific seven-seat capacity or interior volume of the Q7, the Q5 stands on its own.

The Q5 offers Audi's usual three package levels, with a TFSI 2.0L turbo (2.0T) available on the lower model, a normally-aspirated 3.2L V6 on the top model, and either on the middle model. Base prices range from about \$35,000 for Premium, to just under or just over \$40,000 (depending upon engine) for the mid-grade Premium Plus, to about \$50,000 for Prestige. Our test Q5 was the 2.0T Premium Plus with 8-speed Tiptronic transmission. Add metallic paint (\$475), MMI nav-audio package (\$3000), B&O audio (\$850) and destination for a total of \$44,500.

The B&O sound system features GALA (graduated audio level adjustment) to optimize interior sound in varying conditions. The Tiptronic gives us our best results in S and with some application of manumatic control.

We noted some torque-ish tracking, despite its being a quattro, but the Q5 corners really well. The chassis is well balanced, and the vehicle overall has a nice size and feel. Top-rated Audi instruments and controls are fully implemented. Audi remains the uncontested champion of the backup camera: top image quality and a useful display on your turning track. We were happy with the 2.0T, a 211-hp engine achieving 20/27 MPG and a 0-to-60 of 7.1 seconds, compared with the 3.2 V6, at 270 hp, 18/23 MPG and a 0-to-60 of 6.7, at \$3100 higher purchase price. After just a few days, we realize we have really started to "move into" this vehicle, moreso than we do with many one-week vehicles.

Make yourself at home. ■

