

AN ELECTRIC EVENING

By Joe Sage

We've often described media days at one of the big international auto shows as sort of one big Pink Floyd stadium tour concert every 20 or 30 minutes for two days, complete with smoke, pounding music and perhaps backup dancers. It's quite something for each manufacturer to produce, but at least their efforts benefit from elements of scale—as hundreds from all over the world are on hand in one focused window of time.

Audi recently went all out, auto show style and then some, with about two thousand attendees—media, dealers and tech industry—all arriving in San Francisco at once, and just for them. After a few years of stunning show cars and technical news, Audi was ready to show off a near-production e-tron EV.

We flew in and shuttled downtown, where many who had arrived earlier were at Bill Graham Civic Auditorium for Audi Tech Park, a pop-up display offering a first look at the Audi e-tron for the masses. With or without

that as a hors d'oeuvre, all two thousand of us headed to the San Francisco piers, where we boarded old technology—a stern-paddle-wheeler—to cross the Bay to Richmond, a traditionally industrial city north of Oakland and Berkeley. The sun was setting behind the Golden Gate Bridge and Mt Tamalpais, and the fog rolled in over San Francisco, as a new dawn awaited us at the Craneway Pavilion, once a huge Ford assembly plant, converted during World War II to tank and jeep production, now a component of the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front National Historic Park—an appropriate venue for the technical might that will drive our automotive future.

As darkness took hold and our boat glided toward Richmond Inner Harbor, a smattering of fireworks appeared above the shoreline. No, wait, those are *drones*, hundreds of them, coordinated and patterned into a kinetic light show, finally swirling into a cylindrical shape, separating and rotating to become four huge Audi rings in the sky. The walls of Craneway Pavilion had their own light show afoot, with bright blue circuit boards dancing to throbbing house music. The stage was set.

Indoors were lights, music, another flotilla of mini drones, and—action! The theme was announced: “Electric Goes Audi,” a technology-comes-to-us flip of a phrase.

AUDI E-TRON Audi revealed multiple versions of the new 2019 e-tron, some with trick new virtual side mirrors (shown on the silver car at right; not available yet), in signature Antigua Blue Metallic and liquid Florett Silver metallic. A First Edition will be available in Daytona Grey pearl effect.

The Audi A3 e-tron Sportback PHEV (plug-in hybrid) has been available since 2017, capable of all-electric commuting distances and gasoline-hybrid road trips. The new 2019 Audi e-tron is their first fully electric production model, with considerable emphasis on fast charging, as well as performance and utility.

The new Audi e-tron is a midsize SUV, close in length to the Audi A6, with cargo volume of 28.5 cu.ft. with five passengers or 57 cu.ft. with the rear seats down, specifications that reinforce its mission as a capable daily utility vehicle or a road trip cruiser.

Immediately recognizable as an Audi family member, e-tron's grille area is infilled with platinum grey, while details tip to tail are tweaked to maximize aerodynamics moreso than ever. As many vehicles in the past have expressed their power core via hood scoops and strong wheel haunches, e-tron puts emphasis on its “energy center,” the battery, via forcefully flowing black door inserts. Rear lighting with a horizontal emphasis reflects high-end A7, A8 and Q8 models, while four cross-slats in the rear diffuser celebrate the absence of tailpipes in this zero-emission EV.

Regulated cooling air inlet ducts cool the front brakes, while 20-inch wheels are aerodynamically optimized and fitted with ultra-low rolling resistance tires, while a fully clad underbody features an aluminum plate to both protect the high-voltage battery and optimize airflow. Adaptive speed-dependent air suspension is standard.

Waste heat from electric cabin heat and cooling, as well as battery cooling, runs to a heat pump that extends mileage range by up to ten percent. Highly flexible thermal management also allows fast DC charging for long battery life.

Two electric motors provide sporty driving, hitting zero-to-60 mph in 5.5 seconds, with a top speed of 124 mph. As in any EV, full torque is in force from the first touch of the pedal. (Final power and torque specs will be announced later.)

CHARGING STATIONS Audi's “Charging Stations Unleashed” plan, developed with Electrify America, is the charging station of the near future (at right), where EV drivers can grab a bite while their vehicle recharges. Electrify America is investing \$2 billion in a nationwide network of highway and community DC fast chargers and Level 2 stations at workplace and multi-unit dwellings.

ARCADIA POWER Audi has become the first automaker to partner with Arcadia Power, a nationwide digital utility service that matches your electricity usage with renewable energy sources, saving on your power bill through price alert and community solar programs, so e-tron-owning homeowners and renters alike can invest in renewable energy without the added costs of their own rooftop solar unit.

AMAZON In the first collaboration between Amazon Home Services and an automaker, Audi and Amazon aim to make home EV charging as easy as ordering any other item or service from Amazon, with extensive information on EV home charging installation and equipment, upfront info on electrical costs, and the ability to schedule an electrician to install your EV charger.

AUDI E-TRON ARRIVAL Three models of Audi e-tron are planned at rollout. Premium Plus (\$74,800) includes top view cameras, comfort pre-conditioning, driver assist features, LED lighting inside and out, Matrix headlights, virtual cockpit, 705w B&O 16-speaker audio, heated/cooled 12-way power front seats, leather, panoramic sunroof and lots more. Prestige (\$81,800) adds heads-up display, contour massage seats, power door closers, rear sunshade, dual-acoustic side windows, Valcona leather and an air quality package. And the First Edition (\$86,700) adds 21-inch b-color black wheels, aluminum-optic exterior trim, orange brake calipers, ash wood inlays and more. The Audi e-tron is expected to arrive in US showrooms during the second quarter of 2019. ■

