

Since its European birth in 1996—through body alternatives; A, S and RS versions; refreshes and all the rest—this is just the fourth generation of Audi A3, and the third since arriving in the US.

The A3 first hit the US in 2006 as a Sportback, a four-door variant of its initial hatchback form, stylistically much like the A4 Avant of the same era. The sedan appeared in another decade or so.

Working through changes in relative positioning and meaning of Audi's odd and even alphanumeric badges can be a complex exercise. Ultimately, it's best to just take each for what it is at any moment in time. This is easy for the A3 (or S3 or RS3) today, a family of subcompact sedans-only, smallest in the US lineup.

In the market more broadly, smaller sizes now abound, while sedans are rarer. This puts the Audi 3-size family in an attractive niche.

Along with various style, material and functional changes, the whole lineup now has quattro all-wheel drive (you'd be forgiven for assuming they all had, all along). The S3 for 2025 also has chas-

sis upgrades, advanced torque-vectoring rear-axle tech from the RS 3, and a 22-hp bump to 328, bringing it closer to the pricier RS 3. A new turbo preload feature improves throttle response, for a new zero-to-60 time of 4.4 seconds.

Our sample driven here is the Prestige trim, the top S3 trim (\$54,900). (The overall lineup starts at \$38,200 for a base A3, \$48,700 for a base S3). This also sits in a nice power-to-price position against the RS 3 lineup (Audi treats A3/S3 as one family, RS 3 separately, but buyers will look at them all).

Some specs caught our eye even before arrival, with its headroom, rear legroom and particularly trunk volume on the smaller side. (It may look a lot like the currently discontinued A4, but it is still a subcompact.) It is on the lighter side, at just 3,549 pounds, counterbalancing its thirst for premium fuel, together nudging just about 30 mpg highway.

The S lineup has always presented a combination of performance build and premium finish, presented in its power and precision, as well as leading edge features. Styling to convey such a combi-

nation can emphasize either or both. We're fans of the burly black grille on the new S, which leans decidedly more toward powerful performance than luxury (either way, high end). After years of Audi leading much of the industry toward big unified grilles, combining prominent upper and secondary lower air intakes into one, the solid bar across this one has us wondering—does it suggest a move back toward separate grilles? Audi's styling evolution is often gradual, until one day you realize it has been transformed, so we'll keep an eye on this.

The larger 19-inch wheels are certainly part of this S3's bold stance. Some are available with 18s, but these are just perfectly balanced, visually.

The shifter is an odd new beast that does not telegraph its purpose or operation at first glance, looking sort of like a slider, but operating like a toggle, but it becomes intuitive pretty quickly.

Given both S price and S feature heritage, we were surprised not to have such simple features as automatic reverse-dipping and folding mirrors.

A dependence on touch (or capacitance) control

of many features, via subtle sliders on both steering wheel and console controls, is unnecessary, although the annoyance factor eased into a delight factor with some during our week, notably a multifunctional circular pad on the console, where a dial might be or could have been, that is sort of a touch-and-twirl volume control. We found its purposes intuitively and basically enjoyed it intuitively, and this is what matters the most.

On the delight side, the interior has subtle but stunning colored light patterns on the inside of the doors—the kind of thing that can be a \$15k package in a \$600k royal sedan—innovative, clever and contemporary engineering and materials use, incorporating 3D modeling, laser cutting and LEDs, simultaneously dramatic and low-key.

If there's one the instruments could use, it's a more legible gas gauge. This is so hard to see, we found it hard to be sure there's any there at all.

We never got completely comfortable, but we are taller than some, and they do offer other vehicle sizes. At the 3 size, we never did get our seat right and often bashed our knee on the steering column upon entry. (It's our own fault we're tall, but an S5 takes us to \$63k, S6 to \$76k, S8 to \$130k.)

We lament not fitting inside the 3-size a bit better. (Given time, we might—we've ultimately resolved this in our own little sports cars and such.)

This small S sedan is an appropriately hot performer, out of the box. (Philosophically, we prefer a vehicle operates at its optimum at all times, not dependent upon modes and tradeoffs.) That said, the change between S and D (done via the shifter) is not dramatic, which to us is favorable, but if you sometimes want to "go to eleven," you can. To us, it seems performance is about the same, but with more of a powertrain hum. This is all good. It's already an S, and you can apply more S to it. If nothing else, this mode may boost the show-off factor.

We find special appeal at the extremes—perhaps one Audi S3 and one Audi R8 in a two-car garage? That reflects outer boundaries by size and/or power, while also confirming that we like the models offered at either extreme. Being extreme was originally the turf of the S models, until RS. Good news—the price differentials through the Audi 3 range are not as extreme as with the larger sizes. Nonetheless, with RS treated as a separate model from the A-or-S offerings, Audi S3 maintains its solid position on the spectrum. ■

A mainstream mix of extremes

BY JOE SAGE



SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	.....Ingolstadt, Bavaria, Germany
ENGINE/TRANS BUILD	.....Hungary / Germany
PARTS CONTENT	.....US/Can 1% / Germany 51%
ENGINE	.....2.0 TFSI, 16v DOHC, valve lift & variable timing, alum/alum
HP/TORQUE	.....328 hp / 295 lb-ft
COMPRESSION RATIO	.....9.3:1
TRANSMISSION	.....7-spd S-tronic
DRIVETRAIN	.....quattro AWD
TOP SPEED / 0-TO-60	.....155 mph / 4.4 sec
SUSPENSION	.....F: MacPherson strut; R: four-link
STEERING	.....electro-mech, speed-dep pwr asst
BRAKES	.....F: 14.1 (375x34mm) cross-drilled, vented; R: 12.2 (310x22mm) vented
WHEELS	.....19-in multispoke S design, bicolor finish
TIRES	.....235/35 R19 91Y XL non-run flat summer tires
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	.....177.4 / 103.6 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	.....na
TURNING CIRCLE	.....36.5 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	.....36.8 / 36.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	.....41.2 / 35.2 in
CARGO CAPACITY	.....8.3 cu.ft
WEIGHT	.....3549 lb
FUEL / CAPACITY	.....prem unl / 14.5 gal
MPG	.....23/31/26 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE (Premium) \$48,700

PRESTIGE PKG:	Matrix-design LED headlights, animated headlights-taillights, advanced key, Audi Connect nav-plus (trial), MMI nav plus, virtual cockpit plus (12.3-in screen), auto-dim interior mirror w compass, auto-dim power-fold exterior mirrors, garage door opener, hands-on steering wheel detect (deletes flat bottom), heads-up display, LED interior lighting pro pkg, driver's seat memory, SiriusXM (trial), SONOS premium audio w 3D sound, traffic sign recog, adaptive cruise w lane guidance+\$6,200
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SUBTOTAL (Prestige) \$54,900

PAINT:	Ascarl Blue Metallic595
SEATS:	fine Nappa leather1000
BLACK OPTIC PKG:	19-in multispoke S-design wheels, summer tires, anthracite Audi rings, black exterior trim & mirrors, dark chrome exhaust tips	.....1650
S SPORT PKG:	red brake calipers, S sport suspension w damper control	.....1100
BLACK ROOF		.....300
DESTINATION CHARGE		.....1295
TOTAL		.....\$60,840

2025 AUDI A3 / S3 / RS 3 LINEUP

Audi A3 : 201 hp / 236 lb-ft	
Premium	.....\$38,200
Premium Plus	.....40,800
Audi S3 : 328 hp / 295 lb-ft	
Premium	.....\$48,700
Premium Plus	.....51,100
Prestige	.....▼ 54,900
Audi RS 3 : 394 hp / 369 lb-ft	
	.....\$63,400
+ RS Technology Package	.....+2,000
+ Carbon Package	.....+2,750
+ Dynamic Plus Package	.....+5,600