

Audi A8 4.2TDi Quattro SE REVIEW

Despite the fact that it's not the most expensive car it builds, Audi says the new A8 is its 'new flagship' which 'takes an even more responsible approach to luxury'.

Rather than being an extensive overhaul of the outgoing A8, the fourth-generation model is pretty much all-new. It's based around Audi's new longitudinal powertrain layout (which sees the engine sitting a little further back, between the front wheels) and new aluminium spaceframe chassis, which the company says is 24 per cent more rigid. The engines have been re-worked and hooked up to a new 8-speed autobox.

The A8 still rides on aluminium suspension but gets re-designed adaptive air-suspension. Indeed, all of the new A8 models get Audi's clever 'Drive Select' electronic chassis tuning package. The driver can select from 'comfort', 'auto' and 'dynamic' modes, each of which alter the steering response and weight, the damper settings and the transmission shift points.

This model comes with a sports differential as standard, which can selectively divide the engine's torque between the rear wheels, considerably increasing the car's appetite for corners.

Inside, aside from the company's usual fine attention to detail and exemplary build quality, standard equipment includes a hard-drive sat-nav with a touch pad, allowing the driver - searching for a sat-nav destination - to sketch out individual letters with a forefinger. Xenon headlights and double glazing is also standard.



What's it like?

On paper, this revised 4.2-litre V8 turbo diesel looks very impressive. It is good for 346bhp and a driveshaft-twisting 590lb ft of torque from just 1750rpm. Even hooked up to a quattro drivetrain, Audi is claiming an average of 37.2 mpg and CO₂ emissions of 199g/km. It can also hit 62mph in just 5.5 seconds.

What the paper specifications can't communicate, though, is the extraordinarily refinement delivered by this unit. The combination of the huge wave of torque, the under-bonnet hush and almost complete lack of mechanical intrusion into the cabin, lifts this particular car close to the super-luxury sector, in terms of the drivetrain at least.

Defining this car's handling prowess is not so easy. Thanks to the 'Drive Select' adaptive chassis kit, this A8 wears three quite different characters depending on the chassis setting selected. The good news is they all pretty impressively resolved.

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The 'comfort' mode is very good on good roads. The smoothly-surfaced A7 on Spain's southern coast showed this setting in its best light, the car running extremely serenely and very quickly. If there's any criticism is that the steering is little slow in this mode and seemed to be slow to self-centre.

However, if the driver wants smooth progress on more cut-and thrust roads, 'auto' mode seems to succeed in combining a compliant ride and little more edge in the steering and damping, which gives the A8 the kind of unruffled briskness which is ideal for demolishing a series of roundabouts. If this mode can be criticised, it would be a slight sense of distance between the car and driver. But then this is a limo, not a coupe.



In 'Dynamic' the changes to the chassis are quite aggressive, but convincing. The steering weighs up considerably, the damping is much firmer (though the ride is not much less comfortable) and the car turns into corners with an enthusiasm bordering on aggression (partly thanks to the sports differential coming on song). It does, though, allow the driver to drive right up to the limit of the front tyre's adhesion without much prior warning. The electronic chassis aids come smoothly to the rescue, but it was a surprise to be momentarily sliding sideways on a slippery, clay-soaked, road.

Other honourable mentions should go to the overall refinement, lack of road noise, the superb 'yacht-style' gear lever, fine interior ambience and seamless shifts.

Should I buy one?

It would be sensible to hang on a few months until the new Jaguar XJ, the A8s most direct rival, appears in showrooms. However, early reports suggest that the rakish Jaguar is more of performance orientated car, where the triple-personality A8 can be effectively tuned to the driver's mood. What's more Jaguar, or any other rival, will have a job matching this car's amazing powerplant.

Overall, a very fine car.

1. Clean cut and handsome exterior
2. Peerless interior is comfortable and stylish
3. Superb engine range, particularly 4.2 TDI
4. Sharpened responses make for more pleasurable driving

The A8 has been the pinnacle of the Audi range since the first generation version appeared in 1994 and has always brought the most sophisticated technology and the greatest comfort that the brand has to offer. Now the A8 has reached its third generation, and the competition in the executive saloon segment is fiercer than ever.

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The principles of the A8 remain the same for this third generation car. The exterior styling is recognisably an evolution of the outgoing car, although it does also bring several styling cues from elsewhere in the range, in particular the A5 coupe. Although more conservative than two of its key rivals, the A8 is undeniably handsome and well-executed, with some impressive details. It also manages to look smaller than its dimensions would suggest, which is not easy to achieve.

Another continuing key element to the A8's appeal is the use of an aluminium spaceframe chassis. Although a complex undertaking for the manufacturer, Audi claims that it saves 200kg over an equivalent steel chassis whilst matching its rigidity and crash performance. That brings significant benefits to fuel economy and performance by making the most out of the available engine performance.



Mechanically the A8 has air-suspension on all models, plus the Audi drive select system, which gives the driver the opportunity to tailor the car to suit the driving conditions. The engine range has also been updated, with either revised or new units - a mix of three diesels and one petrol is available. All A8s also feature a new eight-speed automatic transmission, which promises smoother shifting and improved fuel economy.

One final area where the A8 has received much attention is in terms of on-board technology. It is available with full LED headlights, a night vision camera and massage seats amongst other equipment. Two of the main highlights are the introduction of a touch-pad to the MMI interface, which allows the drivers to spell out a destination or phone book contact for greater ease of use, and also the advanced satellite navigation, which utilises the Google search engine as well as 'reading' the road ahead and sending information about it to the gearbox to ensure the best gear selection.

Our verdict on the Audi A8 4.2 TDI SE

Nothing less than excellent would do for the A8, and the finished product more than lives up to that target. More attractive inside and out, faster, more efficient and more comfortable, the new A8 also manages to be more fun to drive, almost the only criticism that could have been levelled at the old car.

Costs

The A8 inevitably sits at the higher end of the cost scale, although improvements in efficiency and economy will result in lower fuel bills in the long term. Insurance costs are high regardless of the specification however.

Space and practicality

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The A8 makes the most of its size, bringing impressive levels of cabin space for front and rear passengers. The boot is also generous, if relatively shallow, but this is to be expected with the four-wheel drive system taking up space at the rear of the car.

New design hides the size of the boot

Controls and display

The A8's improved MMI is the heart of the control system, and builds on an already impressive set up. The new touchpad works effortlessly and requires almost no familiarisation from the driver. The rest of the cabin layout is a textbook example of attractive and efficient integration, although despite this it would take a new owner some time to get to grips with all the systems available.



Improvements in handling have not come at the expense of comfort; this is still a supremely comfortable car in which to travel. Double glazing, air-suspension, massage seats - all factors which add to the exceptional comfort on offer. Aids such as the automatic cruise control and the advanced sat-nav also relieve stress on the driver, making it the perfect car for covering long distances with ease.

Car security

Such a desirable car requires a high level of security and the A8 comes complete with a comprehensive alarm system, optional vehicle tracking system and tough double glazing.

Car safety

The A8 showcases some of the latest safety technology to come from Audi so, as well as a comprehensive collection of airbags, ABS and ESP, all A8s come with a basic pre-safe system, which prepares the car for an accident should the ESP sense danger is imminent. This can be optionally upgraded to include collision avoidance with autonomous braking, and even seat adjustment to put occupants in the best position to minimise injury.

Driver appeal

Where the previous generation A8 was undoubtedly comfortable if not thrilling, the new car sets its stall out early on by providing more keen responses through the steering wheel. The air-suspension also

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offers better control through the corners even in Comfort mode, and so the A8 is not only more entertaining but actually easier to drive in normal conditions.



Interior is a wonderful mix of comfort and high tech

Family car appeal

It is probably too expensive to be chosen as a family car, but thanks to the space on offer and the potential for a first-class infotainment system, the A8 could actually do a fine job of keeping a family safe, comfortable and happy.

First car appeal

The A8 is unlikely to feature on the lists of first car buyers, not least due to the price and insurance costs.

Quality and image

Up at the top level of luxury, nothing but the best quality is sufficient, and the A8 does not disappoint. Inside and out it uses very high quality materials, and everything operates with a smoothness and refinement. The A8's image is helped by this high-tech, discreet approach, and the A8 stands out as a car that is for high-flyers who want to avoid some of the ostentatiousness that comes as standard with some of its rivals.

Accessibility

Thanks to large doors front and rear, access to the A8 requires very little effort indeed. Self-closing doors and a remotely-operated boot also remove most of the effort of getting inside.

Stereo and ICE (In car entertainment)

The A8's standard audio system includes a DAB radio, music interface allowing connection for MP3 players, 20GB-worth of storage space plus a CD player. There is also the option to upgrade to a Bose or B and O system, but all offerings produce impressive results, not least because of the low noise levels from the rest of the car.

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LED headlight option is clever and stunning to look at

Colours and trim

Like any luxury saloon of this size, the A8 looks best in more sober hues, and with larger alloy wheels. Inside there is a great scope for mixing colours of hides and wood, but regardless of the choices the overall standard is very high indeed.

Parking

The A8 is of course a large car, but the speed-sensitive power steering means slow-speed manoeuvres are completed with ease. Standard parking sensors front and rear also aid the process.



Everything about the new Audi A8 is softly spoken. It doesn't so much drive down a motorway as ooze over it. The engine is muted hypnotic thrum, the new eight-speed gearbox flirting through the ratios like it's playing a musical scale. Wind noise is non-existent; road noise dropped to a barely-there hiss. Even the suspension is quiet - you *feel* bumps if you hit them hard enough, but you don't *hear* them. Effortless cocoonery, deft and premium-feeling isolation.

The cabin is a grand sweep of tailored perfection, with innumerable threads of super-gadget woven into an architecture that doesn't threaten with button frenzy, or get all impenetrable by congealing functions into a set of submenus accessed by a computer mouse with pretensions. There's a Multi Media Interface screen that pops up out of the dash, controlled by a simple scroll-and-click wheel. Gears are accessed via a lovely gear selector that looks a bit like the throttle control from an aeroplane, which then acts as a kind of lazy wrist-rest when you're playing with functions on the move. The seats adapt and move in ways your body may not even accommodate. For the first few tens of minutes, all you do is sit in the thing, pushing and prodding switches.

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Drive it, and the impression is that Audi is taking its flagship model very seriously. The air suspension is a serious filter: even when you play with the Audi 'drive select' system, which alters damping rates, throttle response and gearbox strategy and go faster, it remains supple and absorbent. All the models we drove featured quattro four-wheel drive, and even though the general feature is one of gentle understeer, if you option the sports differential, you can even provoke a whiff of oversteer as torque is shuttled to the outside wheel.

We'll be offered three engines at launch in the UK: a pair of 4.2-litre V8s - a 370bhp petrol and a 350bhp, 590lb ft diesel - and a more practical 250bhp 3.0 V6 diesel that should see 70 to 80 per cent of the business in the UK, thanks to a very impressive 42.8mpg. Later this year, we'll see another version of the V6, with a more parsimonious bent and front-drive only, chucking out a scarcely credible 159g/km of CO₂ and returning an attractive 47.1mpg on the combined cycle, while still pumping out just over 200bhp. Which is pretty impressive when you consider this is still a large luxury car that can put the green-eyed smackdown on the neighbours.

Funnily enough, the pick of the bunch is the stock V6, a new engine that features a revised injection system. But that's not to say that it isn't impressive as hell. The figures speak for themselves, but 250bhp, 405lb ft, 0-62mph in 6.6 seconds, 155mph and 42mpg are worth repeating. It's a more intuitive car to drive down a twisty road than either of the slightly heavier-feeling V8s too - it feels lighter, more wieldy, slightly more connected. Both V8s are wonderful, but they seem denser, and more suited to monsterring larger, Germanic roads. Saying that, if you want to cruise through Germany at 130mph, the hugely torquey 4.2-litre V8 is a proper autobahn-stormer.

And the tech will give the Mercedes S-Class a decidedly close run for its money. You can option the usual high-end luxu-glitter like nightvision cameras, a 1,460-watt Bang & Olufsen stereo, massage chairs and the like, but the A8 brings a few new options to the table that'll have geeks blushing. There's now a touchpad with handwriting recognition for programming functions like satnav, there's Google news and weather streamed direct to the car and there's the ability to make the car into a mobile WLAN hotspot. It's also got an advanced Audi 'pre-sense' anti-crash system that can check whether a car is indicating to pull out, and modulate the adaptive cruise to suit. Better than that, later in the year a module will allow the satnav to talk to the gearbox, adaptive cruise control and swivelling, all-LED lights, allowing the A8 to make decisions about how it might react to oncoming hazards. Hello HAL.

The issues are few and far between. Perhaps the most obvious one is that the new A8 doesn't have the instant visual impact of the cars that went before it. It looks better in real life, but there's a wealth of detail that isn't quite right. Take the headlights. Now, I'm a fan of making lights interesting, but the lightbar that nestles inside the headlamp on the A8 doesn't suit it. Switch the lights off, and the A8 has a slightly frowning but pleasant physog. Switch the lightbar on, and the car looks pinched and grumpy. And although there's a lot more texture in the surfacing when you see it in the metal, there's too much generic Audi DNA in the flow. From the back, at a distance, this really does look like an A4. Not ideal.

Also, the dynamic steering weights up strangely around corners, changing the ratio of the rack and generally feeling about as honest as a market-stall Rolex. It might suck out kickback and give reliably damped steering, but given that you can chuck the new A8 around pretty effectively, it holds the car back a bit.

Overall, then: not an instant hit with the styling, but enough polish on the rest of the car to warrant consideration - or at least a reprieve until we figure out whether we'll grow to like the funny face.

Electric steering adjust	Standard
Electric Sunroof	£1,450
Manual sunroof	Not Available

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Air conditioning	Not Available
Cruise control	Standard
Electric mirrors	Standard
Heated mirrors	Standard
Electric windows front	Standard
Electric windows rear	Standard
Seat height adjustment	Standard
Climate Control	Standard
Power Steering	Standard
Steering adjustment reach	Standard
Steering adjustment rake	Standard
Power Seats	Standard
Heated Seats	Standard
Panoramic sunroof	Not Available
Electric Panoramic Sunroof	Not Available
Power Folding Mirror	Standard
Engine & Transmission	
Auto	Standard
CVT	Not Available
Tiptronic	Standard
Particulate filter	Standard
Entertainment	
Radio/Cassette	Not Available
RDS Radio/Cassette	Not Available
CD	Standard
Multi CD	£665
MP3/iPod Connection	Standard
DVD Player	£3,830
MP3 CD Player	Standard
RDS CD	Standard
Hard Drive	Standard
Exterior	
Metallic paint	Standard
Alloy wheels	Standard
Front Foglights	Standard

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Powered sliding doors	Not Available
Interior	
Hands Free Phone Kit	Standard
Satellite navigation	Standard
Leather Seats	Standard
Split/fold seats	Not Available
Bluetooth	Standard
7 seat pack	Not Available
Safety	
Passenger airbag	Standard
Side airbags	Standard
ABS	Standard
3 Point centre belt	Standard
Driver's airbag	Standard
Belt pretensioners	Standard
Isofix	Standard
Side Impact Bars	Standard
Traction control	Standard
Curtain Airbag	Standard
Rear Parking Sensor	Standard
Electronic stability programme	Standard
On/Off Passenger Airbag	Standard
Driver's knee airbag	Not Available
Reversing Camera	Standard
Rain Sensing Wipers	Standard
Adaptive Cruise Control	£2,045
Lane Departure Warning	£510
Front Parking Sensor	Standard
Passenger Knee Airbag	Not Available
Security	
Alarm	Standard
Immobiliser	Standard
Deadlocks	Standard
Central locking	Standard
Remote locking	Standard

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Unique fit stereo	Standard
Marked Parts	Standard
Etched Windows	Not Available
Locking Wheel nuts	Standard
Visible VIN	Standard
Secure spare wheel	Standard
Satellite tracking	Not Available
Laminated Glass	Not Available
Options calculator	Price
Electric Sunroof	£1,450 ☐
Multi CD	£665 ☐
DVD Player	£3,830 ☐
Adaptive Cruise Control	£2,045 ☐
Lane Departure Warning	£510 ☐

Update Price

Total Price: £68,785

[Next: Running costs](#)

Running costs	
Town mpg	30.4
Out of town mpg	44.8
Average mpg	38.2
Tank capacity (litres)	90
CO2 Rating (g/km)	195
Carbon offset cost	£28
Green rating	J
Insurance group	47
Typical insurance	£1,136.00
% Value retained (3yrs/36000 miles)	37%
Typical contract hire	£982.00
Pence per mile	132
Servicing costs - 3 years	£1,617.00
Service intervals	Variable
Warranty period	3yr/60k + 3yr Paint + 12yr Perforation + 3yr/RAC Breakdown
Three-year cost	£47,000

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Running costs		
Company car tax		
Percentage charge		33
Benefit in kind		£22,529.00
Tax payable 20%		£4,506.00
Tax payable 40%		£9,012.00
Body type		Saloon
Number of doors		4
Number of seats		5
Engine (cc/type)		4134/V8
Number of Valves		32
Fuel type		Diesel
Max power (bhp/rpm)		350/4000
Pulling power (lb/ft)		590
Engine position		F
Driven wheels		Four
Length (mm)		5137
Width (mm)		1949
Height (mm)		1460
Front headroom (mm)		1036
Boot space (min ltr)		510
Boot space (max ltr)		510
Turning circle (m)		12.3
Towing weight (kg)		2300
Kerb weight (kg)		1995
Manufacturers figures		
0-60 mph (secs)		5.5
Max speed (mph)		155
Euro NCAP Test Scores		
Adult protection		Unavailable
Child protection		Unavailable
Pedestrian protection		Unavailable
Body type		Saloon
Number of doors		4

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Euro NCAP Test Scores

Number of seats	5
Engine (cc/type)	4134/V8
Number of Valves	32
Fuel type	Diesel
Max power (bhp/rpm)	346/4000
Pulling power (lb/ft)	590
Engine position	F
Driven wheels	Four
Length (mm)	5137
Width (mm)	1949
Height (mm)	1460
Front headroom (mm)	1036
Boot space (min ltr)	510
Boot space (max ltr)	510
Turning circle (m)	12.3
Towing weight (kg)	2300
Kerb weight (kg)	1995

Manufacturers figures

0-60 mph (secs)	5.5
Max speed (mph)	155