

CLASSIC DRIVER

Test driving the Audi Q7



"Never before has a vehicle had to go through such a broad-based spectrum of tasks and operational conditions during testing." So says Franciscus van Meel, Technical Project Manager responsible for the development of the new Audi Q7 SUV.

Checks are being carried out on a vast array of test beds - on Volkswagen Group proving grounds, at minus 35 degrees Celsius inside the Polar Circle, in the scorching desert heat of Southern Africa, on the highways of Florida, on dust, grit and gravel in Europe, Asia, Brazil and Central America, through to the gruelling Nordschleife of Germany's Nürburgring. But this is not all. The Q7 is also being put through its paces on lonely, winding country roads, on autobahns and in the midst of heavy city traffic in congested urban areas. For over two years now, disguised Q7s have been out and about on public roads, as well as in the most remote corners of the earth, under extreme dynamic, climatic and topographic conditions.

The Q7 has to prove itself on the world's toughest race track - the Nürburgring's Nordschleife. This is where Audi handling engineers, mechanics and supplier representatives spend 13 to 14 weeks a year pushing the SUV to its limits. The 20.8 kilometre Nordschleife, with its 33 left and 40 right bends, offers the best possible route profile for optimising handling (running gear, steering, wheels, tyres, shock absorbers, springs and bearings) and braking, as well as vehicle comfort characteristics in extreme situations.



Heike Biebl-Walther heads up testing for North America at Audi. "Vehicle requirements vary a great deal across the different markets," she says. "That is why it is important to take these requirements into account at an early stage in the vehicle development process. Many Americans spend considerably more time in their vehicles than us Europeans," she explains. "In the case of long commutes, for example, it's quite normal to eat breakfast in your car. For this reason, features such as storage facilities, power outlets or cup holders

take on a whole new significance for the driver. In the Q7, these requirements have been comprehensively addressed."

Across the USA from east to west, Audi Q7 models are continuously being put through this sort of testing in order to ensure that they also function perfectly in customer hands, be it in scorching heat, freezing cold, choking dust and equally choking traffic.



In parallel with the development process, the USA is also host to regular sign-off drives, on which the Board of Directors and top management of AUDI AG put the vehicles through a comprehensive check-up. On one occasion this actually included taking the Q7 through its paces on the 4,300 metre high Pikes Peak. It was this very mountain that inspired the name of the Audi concept car, which signalled the start of the Q7 at the 2003 Detroit Motor Show.

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