

# CLASSIC DRIVER



## Audi A5 Cabriolet

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**At Audi, there seems to be a resistance to the collapsing economy, a refusal to have its spirit crushed. Perhaps it's the German equivalent of a stiff upper lip? Before crunch and credit ever came together, the marque was committed to a 40-model range by 2012 and the small matter of world financial meltdown isn't going to stop them. So, throughout the past few months, new model has followed new model - and we're not talking apologetic eco variants with marginally longer gearing and silly names, we're talking R8 V10 and Audi TT RS and the like - and now the new A5 Cabriolet...**

Eschewing the folding metal roof systems of many competitors, Audi has stuck with a fabric soft-top for its new cabrio. The benefits of this approach, mainly lower weight and the absence of complex metal-folding shenanigans - with all the space that takes up - mean more room for luggage and rear passengers. And fewer styling compromises, too. In a car with the build quality of an Audi, the three-layered soft roof is so well-insulated that wind noise is minimal. And for those who want the near-silence of a solid roof, an optional acoustic hood reduces 'sound intrusion' to that of the A5 Coupé, give or take. Audi has proved that, in the convertible market, coupé-cabriolets are by no means the only way forward.



Last month, UK sales opened with an initial choice of three engines – 4-cylinder turbocharged 2.0 TFSI, 3.2 FSI V6 with 265PS, and a 6-cylinder 3.0 TDI with 240PS – the latter packing 500Nm of torque and offering Quattro four-wheel drive as standard. We chose the diesel for our two-day jaunt in Spain, impressed by the claim of 0-62mph in 6.4 seconds but wondering if the diesel engine would be sufficiently responsive for true driving pleasure in the steep hills of Granada. There was also the question of whether an oil-burning engine would take the edge off our joy with noise and vibration.

Noise and vibration? Silly us. This is an Audi. Just to make things crystal clear: the low-down torque from that fabulous 3.0 TDI propelled us to higher speeds with such understated aplomb that it's hard to fault and, as for 'noise and vibration', it wasn't altogether easy to guess that this *was* a diesel engine, other than the giveaway sign of its tremendous torque.



There is, it must be admitted, an occasional hint of unwanted vibration from the body itself – a subtle shudder when pushed through the trickiest of terrains – that betrays the lack of a solid roof and its attendant rigidity. It would almost certainly be improved by the selection of smaller wheels and hence less severe low-profile tyres. Yes, low-profile tyres look the business but – as ever – they wreck the ride. And this open-topped four-seater is not the car to risk them in. Meanwhile, the all-new seven-speed S tronic twin-clutch gearbox featured on the 3.0 TDI Quattro (and also on the forthcoming S5 Cabriolet) is good enough to remind us why a stick-shift is not always the transmission of choice, even for the most 'enthusiastic' of drivers.



As always, the Quattro system adds to the security, and sheer ability of this admittedly heavy car to dive into corners – and, more importantly, out again. I know there are some boy-racers out there who think this supreme command of the road lacks the ‘fun’ of tail-out antics in less accomplished motors. Were the four-wheel drive set-up soggy on turn-in, or understeer-y on exiting a corner, I could see their point – but it’s not. Does, then, ‘fun’ equate to ‘hairy’? Is it automatically more fun, for example, to drive a car with excessive oversteer, rather than one with commendably neutral handling?

Now, I’m no expert on the track – not by a long chalk – but watching the tail-out drivers on track days as they trail further and further behind the neat manoeuvres of the real professionals, who control their drifts with the precision of a mathematical equation, I come to the conclusion that there are different sorts of fun. Let’s leave it at that.

The A5 Cabriolet 3.0 TDI Quattro SE 7-speed S tronic starts at £37,935. Later this year, further engine variants, including 2.0 TDI and 2.7 TDI, will be introduced to the UK.

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*Photos: Audi*

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