

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Audi TT RS

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They say there's no such thing as a bad new car these days. They are wrong. However, in recent experience, there has certainly been no such thing as a bad new Audi. The TT RS, yet another fine new Audi product, is likely to change the rather soft image of the TT. The TT has been with us for a decade and the RS, whether in Coupé or Roadster form, looks as good as ever but the stunning performance is on a new level. This is a very fast car indeed.

In standard form, the top speed is limited to 155mph but you can opt to have that restriction removed, raising top speed to 174mph. This adds £1300 to the OTR price of £42,985 for the Coupé or £44,885 for the Roadster and it might seem an expensive option as there aren't even any special tyres required. Unrestricted cars, however, come with some fancy carbonfibre styling around the engine – which other TT RS owners will spot quite easily.



The 0-62mph time of 4.6 seconds puts every TT RS close to the ultimate supercar league and there is enough difference in the appearance for anybody to tell the difference between an RS and a standard TT. If the fixed rear spoiler is too much for some, it's possible to opt for the standard one which rises only at speed and is thus more discreet. The aerodynamic effect of either spoiler is the same.

Advanced Quattro four-wheel drive is standard for this uncompromising sports version of the TT, all of which come only with a very slick six-speed manual gearbox. The mid-mounted engine at the heart of matters evokes the glorious Audi five-cylinder turbo days of old. This new engine, however, is incredibly compact and light, thanks to exotic materials and casting techniques which until recently were used only in racing.



A 2.5-litre TFSI, it gives 340HP from 5400rpm to 6700rpm and, coupled with terrific torque from low revs, the RS is always ready to surge ahead on the road. With 332lb ft available from 1600rpm to 5300rpm, and almost no feeling of lag, the acceleration in any gear is more than impressive. The Sport button opens a flap in the exhaust at lower than normal engine speeds, making slightly more noise and giving a claimed sharpening of engine response, but I could not tell any difference there. Engine response was always

excellent.

For a car of this performance, the official combined cycle fuel consumption of 30.7mpg for the Coupé and 29.7mpg for the Roadster are again top of the class. For this type of car, Audi claims it's the fastest, the best for mpg, the lowest on CO2 emissions and, adds the manufacturer, it has gained the highest residual value prediction.



These figures are very impressive but the most outstanding feature of the TT RS is its secure handling when driven fast through corners. Its unique all-wheel drive system, now so very well developed, is just one of the factors here. The immensely strong, composite structure of the car, plus its excellent weight distribution and very well sorted suspension all play their part.

Our test route took us to Zolder circuit, former home of the Belgian GP, where the RS could be pushed to its extremes. With drizzle making the circuit very slippery, the TT RS maintained its astonishing stability and refused to be upset even when pressed to the very limit. Maintaining a supremely balanced stance, with an attitude biased generally to mild understeer, even in these conditions it could be hustled along very quickly indeed.

This feeling of controllability, combined with the extraordinary traction away from wet corners, has to be experienced to be believed. When pushed like this, the torque bias goes considerably towards the rear but never enough to make it feel like a leery, rear-wheel drive car. Even when the ESP system is completely deactivated, the RS still feels exceptionally safe, indicating that this is a fundamentally sound car which does not require electronic help to mask some fault. There is no such fault here. This is a civilised machine but also, let's say it again, a very quick one.



All the test cars were running on the optional 19in rims and, although the ride was always good, at low speeds there was a slight sense of the harshness that comes with low-profile tyres. Extremists might go further still and opt for the even sexier-looking 20in wheels – but I do have a suspicion that the RS would feel at its best (under most conditions) on the standard 18in rims. On the other hand, the optional Audi magnetic ride, giving Comfort and Sport settings, is – in my opinion – worth having.

Note that the Coupé has occasional 2+2-style rear seats, whereas the Roadster, which has to accommodate its foldaway roof, is a pure two-seater. The TT RS is on sale now, with UK deliveries starting this month.

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