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Wheels: Audi's A3 Adds More Economy to a Sporty Brand

By Tim Saunders

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The Audi A3 lets drivers put the gas pedal to the floor without needing to worry about a plummeting fuel gauge.

Editor's note: Wheels is a section featuring car reviews.

Driving experience — two words that every motorist knows about, no matter what vehicle they drive. For some, it will be a wholesome, positive experience, while for others — totally unsatisfactory. The latter is not necessarily the car's fault either, I might add, but rather the driver's sheer incompetence behind the wheel. But enough of the driving instructor's tales and my Sunday afternoon experiences.

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Facts at a Glance

Audi A3

Price range:
869,000 — 1,089,500 rubles ($26,519 — $33,326)
Engine: 1.8-liter turbo direct injection
0- 100 kph: 7 seconds
Power: 177 bhp
Top speed: 232 kph
Fuel tank: 50 liters
Economy: 21.25 kpl

Source: Audi

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So often the whole experience can be a pretty monotonous affair especially with the amount of vehicles on the roads. Readers of The Moscow Times perusing this article in another endless jam in the capital will no doubt agree.

It is therefore refreshing to sit inside the Audi A3 TFSi S line, which responds to almost every driver's whim, including, especially for Muscovites, a reliable engine stop/start that saves fuel by automatically turning the engine off when stationary and restarting the moment the foot is removed from the brake and placed on the accelerator. There are five different modes ranging from economy to dynamic. Understandably, the latter is far more enjoyable. After all, it is the driving experience that lies at the heart of this splendid machine. Equipped with no less than a seven-speed S-tronic automatic transmission, the driver can use it either as a traditional automatic, or if they are feeling that they want more control, the stick can be pushed to the left and pushed up or down to go through the gears manually. If that is still not satisfactory, then the paddle shifts on either side of the uniquely designed steering wheel will deliver an experience akin to driving a racing car.

To experience this car at its best it's necessary to escape Moscow and head for the countryside; somewhere like Beliye Stolby in the Domodedovo district will do just fine. Free roads will allow you to really open this car up. When selecting dynamic mode and using the manual option, the A3 is noticeably much more responsive, agile and nimble although there is still a slight delay when the accelerator is kicked. Push the accelerator to the floor and it seems to go on and on forever. A very gutsy and exhilarating experience. It's interesting to note that the paddle shifts can be used in conjunction with the manual option, if required.

Speed and agility are all very well, but traditionally such vehicles guzzled fuel like no tomorrow. I am therefore positively astounded that not only will this hot hatch travel from 0 to 100 kilometers per hour in just seven seconds, but it will also return a staggering 21.25

kilometers per liter. You really can put your foot down without worrying about the fuel gauge plummeting. To put this into perspective it is more efficient than my own diesel Ford Fiesta, which certainly does not provide the driving experience or performance.

The sporty feel throughout the A3 S line is helped by the golf ball topped gearstick and the sports-leather covered steering wheel. The driving position is critical, and pleasingly I have no complaints, my arms comfortably resting outstretched at the ten to two position on the steering wheel. You would be surprised how often this ideal position is not attained due to an incorrect seat height that can't be adjusted to perfection and/or a steering wheel that cannot be adjusted for the optimum position.

With a dashboard that leans toward minimalism, it is certainly a refreshing take on what can so often be an overpowering cluttered experience. The few switches present relate to such things as heated front seats and the air conditioning. It does take a while to adjust to the position of the volume control for the stereo; to the right of the gearstick.

The owners of a hot hatch like this are likely to be affluent 20 to 30 year olds. Therefore, my baby seat and stroller test is wholly unfair. But a necessity with my family. This three-door model will begrudgingly accept two baby seats in the rear; the front seats barely fold far enough forward to allow for the seats to be easily fitted in the back. The trunk is large enough for a stroller.

A long drive finally resulted in my little daughters falling asleep. That doesn't happen in every car I drive.

Overall, it takes much to beat this compact hatch, which is easy to park and supremely quick. It is one of my favorite vehicles.

Read more reviews at testdrives.biz. Contact the author at bizreporter@imedia.ru

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