

Now here's an interesting four-door sedan with dual personalities. On one hand you've got a fine handling performance sedan with a 200 horsepower turbocharged 4-cylinder engine plus Quattro (all wheel drive in Audi-speak). On the other, an economy sedan that easily gets around 33 to 34 miles per gallon during steady highway cruising. Audi might be onto something—perhaps a new category of crossover vehicle?

For 2005 the popular A4 was redesigned with sharper lines and the new Audi trademark grille. Yes, that grille. The great big one. On the smaller A4 it's a bit too dominant, but not to worry—a solution came to me as I was staring at it. Just paint the horizontal black plastic piece inside the grille body color. Voilà! It assumes more “normal” proportions again.

While the previous design was smoother and more conservative, the new look is aggressive, sporty and distinctive. A4s can be had in wagon form too, and a convertible is on the way. Audi offers a wide range of powertrains including the turbo-4, a 255 hp V6 and 340 hp V8 (called S4), with fwd or awd, sticks and autos, depending on the engine you choose.

My tester was equipped with the aforementioned turbo 4-cylinder and 6-speed Tiptronic automatic that gives you the choice of shifting manually. Quick upshifts and downshifts are merely a slap away, or you can just relax and go full auto. Unless you simply have to exercise your left leg, you'll enjoy the versatility of this automatic.

The sportiness continues inside the cabin, with firm, every-which-way adjustable seats that are well bolstered to hold you in place. In between the tach and speedometer is an information display that provides helpful data including average fuel consumption, radio frequency and more. And, with built-in XM radio (part of the Bose Premium sound system option) I was in oldies heaven from beginning to end.

This time the winding road took us away from California to the Cooney family reunion in the woods of north-western Pennsylvania. Not unexpectedly, there were plenty of opportunities



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY

Audi A4 2.0 Turbo Quattro Sports sedan? Economy car? Both?

to sample the A4's performance on the region's beautiful two-lane highways. Even with four aboard, passing slower drivers was a snap. Just floor it and let the turbo spin up some serious high-pressure horsepower.

Handling is right up there too, and this is an enthusiast's sedan, make no



mistake. With a taut and nicely tuned suspension, fairly grippy tires and all wheel drive, this is a machine with high cornering limits that felt secure and poised when pushed harder.

Since all wheel drive adds weight and frictional losses, you'd expect gas mileage to suffer. On the A4 however, it seems you can have the best of both worlds. In my week of driving the A4, including those full throttle passes, I averaged 29.5 miles per gallon. Impressive. In city-only driving, the

information display still registered 20-plus mpg most of the time. And on freeway jaunts, mileage in the low 30s seemed the norm.

The only minor performance glitch came in the form of a slight but noticeable turbo lag. From a stop sign, upon depressing the gas pedal the turbo takes a second to spool up and deliver its punch. This translates into a moment of slow forward motion followed by a somewhat abrupt hit of power. On the plus side, since turbochargers force feed the fuel-air mixture to the engine under higher-than-atmospheric pressure, you won't have nearly the power loss with it as you will with a non-turbo engine at higher elevations—a major bonus for mountain driving.

Pricing on A4s begins at \$31,370 including destination. With added 17-inch wheels, Bose stereo and extra creature-comfort options, this one totaled \$35,870. Considering its noteworthy combination of power, handling, foul-weather AWD traction and fuel economy, Audi has come up with an impressive package that delivers driving satisfaction in spades and is nicely stylish to boot. Take a look at www.audiusa.com.

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