

Test Drive: The 2012 Audi A7 Redefines The Coupe

BY WILLIE G. | JAN 26, 2012 | 10:12 AM | PERMALINK

I may be a liberal in the voting booth, but when it comes to my automobiles, you can color me a staunch conservative. Nine times out of 10, I'll pick the manual transmission over the slickest paddle-shift. Electric power? Pfft. And coupes? Yeah, I'll stand by the dictionary and affirm that they have two doors. So when I heard that Audi planned a CLS-style "four-door coupe" to fit in between their established A6 and A8, I rolled my eyes and complained at the continuance of a trend I just thought silly—even if it was just a misuse of nomenclature.

I soon ate my words, as raw and unseasoned as they may have been. Taking delivery of a metallic-black A7, I did my best to not act downright silly at the new object of affection in my driveway. From nose to tail, the four-ringer's sportback (nowhere in the paperwork will you find the word coupe) is a long car, but pulls off a decisively agile appearance, largely since its front and rear-end styling resembles its racier siblings. Perched on each sides of the gaping, chrome-trimmed grille, sit headlamps that hold all the style and intricacies of a luxury timepiece. Fire 'em up, and angled LED daytime running lamps resemble the cocked-brow of a flirtatious female, giving a daring "How YOU doin'?" to passers-by. I've never been a believer in love at first sight, but you can probably tell already that I had fallen in lust.



2012 Audi A7
 Engine: 3.0 liter supercharged V6
 Power: 310hp, 325 lb.-ft.
 Fuel Economy: 18 city, 28 hwy
 Price as tested: \$83,500

Getting up inside her, I did think the fire might fizzle. However, it didn't take long to see that Audi had accomplished something others in the "redefined coupe" game hadn't. A larger-sized luxury ride without a doubt, the A7's sporty vibe is recognizably carried into the cabin. Firm, high-backed seats, jet-like controls and a unique, non-varnished wood-grain trim deliver a dose of Audi's race heritage, while its layout provides ample room for three of your amigos (amigas if you're lucky). And while I'm usually quick to put the moves on, the A7's interior features gave me more than enough reason to want to just chill and get to know her. In addition to Audi's already robust MMI infotainment system, this sexy middle sibling is one of the brand's first offerings to also offer Audi Connect, a Google-powered piggy-back to standard navigation and audio controls. My days of understanding the latest in technology are fast escaping me, but the vibrant screen that rose out of the car's dash upon start-up made me feel like a kid at play. Surprisingly, everything from configuring a route, to pairing a phone, to streaming audio via Pandora with the onboard Wifi hotspot was incredibly easy to figure out and activate.

But the A7's myriad technologies don't end in the realms of pleasure. After hooking all four wheels solidly to the ground via the industry-renowned Quattro AWD system, I noticed its commitment to my safe and enjoyable driving experience. Most noteworthy and helpful may be the car's heads-up speedometer display, a ghostly ice-blue image of your speed that floats on the windshield, just under your field of view. Yeah, it's been done before, but Audi's execution is one of the cleanest, crispest versions I've encountered. And if you enjoy your ride's capabilities to the extent that I do, you'll quickly thank the engineers for building in such a feature. Because while the 310hp and 325 lb.-ft. of the 7's 3.0 liter supercharged V6 may not sound earth-shattering, it's power that hits fast, yet with the utmost fluidity. A bona fide ticket-machine, the sportback is one of those cars that makes 100mph feel like about 65—not like I'd ever drive at such irresponsible speeds. I'm just saying.

Taking on the night, the A7 can also be KITT-ed with another high-tech feature that'll appeal to those of y'all stuck in the sticks. Developed by AutoLiv, a manufacturer of vehicular safety systems, the available Night Vision2 system senses body heat of any person or creature larger than a New York City rat that decides to play chicken with you on the road. Seemingly straight out of the cockpit of an F-16, the feature locks onto live "targets" and highlights them in yellow on a cluster-mounted display screen. Get too close, and you'll be hit with an audible alert, signaling you to hit the ejector seat, err, jerk the wheel. While I didn't encounter any deer in my travels, the technology proved quite able to hone in on fixed-gear-riding hipsters and signal me when I got too close to their mangy beards. On top of all the aforementioned fare, the cabin feels just steps away from the *Ghost Protocol* BMW—and it's out now.

There are a few drawbacks to this seemingly perfect balance of luxury and sport. While the A7 will indeed have you feeling like you opted for something much more svelte and streamlined, it's still a big car. Parallel parking is a feat only to be attempted by the most skilled of drivers, as its overall length is deceiving. I suggest giving yourself additional time when heading out for the night, or, better yet, just finding a valet. Additionally, though the A7 starts at a reasonable sticker of \$59,250—much lower than competitors like the CLS or Panamera—the options and dollars rack up quickly. By the time you're done tricking one out with all the available bells and whistles, you can easily find yourself in the \$80-90K range. All that aside, when it comes down to amending the very definition of the word coupe, I'm ready to vote, "Yes we can!"