

MOTERING FOCUS: AUDI RS 3 SPORTBACK

As the most powerful hot-hatch in series production, the all-new second generation Audi RS 3 Sportback is capable of giving supercars a complex.



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The RS3 is powered by a bonkers-quick turbocharged five-cylinder engine that beats fellow German, the Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG. The Audi's 2.5-litre engine pumps out 362bhp, allowing for a 0-62mph sprint time of just 4.3 seconds - and a potential top speed of up to 174mph.

The car gargles and crackles at the best of times; but everything is taken up a notch when you select Dynamic mode via the Drive Select system. This opens the flaps in the sports exhaust system – an option that is a must have. Next, move the auto gear selector into Sport, stamp on the gas and the sound the Audi makes is like Thor having a bad day.

Without a doubt, the engine and gearbox are perfectly harmonized. The seven-speed dual-clutch S tronic 'box punches its way through the cogs quickly, cleanly and crisply. This adds to the car's ability to be

alert and precise at all times. In fact, the Audi feels well ahead of any other vehicle in the premium hot-hatch market.

Being an all-wheel-drive (AWD) motor, the RS3 will lose a little grip from the front wheels when pushed to the edge, but you have to be driving crazily fast for it to start playing up.

The Audi's sporty suspension can feel a bit firm, but that's the price you pay if you want balance and a feeling of security at speed. Indeed, the RS3 is brilliantly controlled at any rate of knots, and long sweeping bends are the car's strong point. Tilt the nose in, shift the weight to the outside wheels and the renowned Quattro AWD system ensures there's gargantuan grip to be had, enabling you to increase the speed on the way out.

Inside, the cabin is functional but it's also marvellously refined. The materials used, and the solid fit and finish are exactly what Audi aficionados will love and expect. The interior is a comfortable and pleasurable place to be, and there's the Audi multimedia interface (MMI) media system that is one of the finest around.

The all-new Audi RS3 Sportback is not cheap, and there isn't a lot of room for adults in the back, but it is a staggeringly quick road car that will handle track days. It will also leave you with a big grin, no matter where you drive it.

FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 155 mph (optionally raised to 174mph)
- 0-62 mph: 4.3 secs
- Combined mpg: 34.9
- Engine: 2480cc 5 cylinder 20 valve turbo petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 362
- Max. torque (lb.ft): 343
- CO₂: 189 g/km
- Price: £39,950 on the road.

PROS 'N' CONS

- Power ✓
- Thrills ✓
- Handling ✓
- Kit ✓
- Pricey X
- Rear room X