

Audi's S6 is rolling finesse, inside and out

by Mark_Maynard

Using a whisper to get attention might have its uses in a social situation. But when muscling into a group of high-performance sedans, nothing says "Listen to me" like a 435-horsepower, V-10.

2007 AUDI S6 QUATTRO - The 435-horsepower Audi S6 V-10 has a starting price of \$72,720 and with options can run \$79,070. And that seems reasonable considering such competitors as the BMW M5 can push \$100,000 with options and the Mercedes-Benz E62 can run more than \$90,000. CNS Photo courtesy of Audi.

That's what Audi puts in its S6 sedan to shake up the choices between the BMW M5, Cadillac STS-V, Jaguar XJR and Mercedes-Benz E63.

There is a horsepower hierarchy among this clan of sedans, but only two have 10 cylinders, which includes the BMW.

BMW is the benchmark in this group and it has the car with the longest history, reputation and provenance. However, Audi appears determined not to have a second-place car. And one it can keep competitive. After all, if BMW gets 500 hp from its 5.0 liter and Mercedes gets 507 hp from a 6.3 liter V-8, Audi surely has room to raise the roof in its 5.2 liter V-10.

For now, 435 hp feels about right, but 500 wouldn't be too much, as the power is distributed through all-wheel drive.

The S6 has a starting price of \$72,720, including \$720 freight charge. The test car with options was \$79,070. And that seemed reasonable considering the BMW can push \$100,000 with options and the Benz can run more than \$90,000.

The S6 is rolling finesse, inside and out. It has flared fenders, quad tailpipes, integrated rear spoiler, platinum-gray grille and the oh-so-eye-catching V-10 badges on the front fenders. The car looks special, even dignified when it drives by. The M5 looks like the jock of the group, the E63 the elders' car.

The choice of a V-10 wasn't purely for bragging rights. Though it doesn't hurt for enthusiasts to know that this engine is a variant of the one used for the Lamborghini Gallardo. Audi owns Lamborghini.

Audi says a V-8 of 5.2 liters would need large, heavy pistons and connecting rods. That's good for torque, but the engine doesn't rev as freely for high-rpm performance.

And the V-10 is a free revver, with peak horsepower at 6,800 rpm and redline at 7,000. Peak torque - 398 foot-pounds - is felt quickly at 3,000 to 4,000 rpm and more than 90 percent of it comes on as low as 2,300 rpm. It's this launch factor that makes the Audi stand out from the Bimmer and Benz.

Common-rail injection - rather than indirect, manifold injection - atomizes fuel directly into the engine cylinders, which allows more complete combustion. And a more complete combustion means reduced emissions.

Buckling into the driver seat was almost like zipping up the Spiderman suit and tingling with Spidey sense. There is an uncanny oneness that envelops the driver.

On or off the power, the car has a crouched stance, poised and ready to leap, which it will do.

The only transmission is the six-speed Tiptronic, which some enthusiasts don't consider to be a real transmission. BMW offers a six-speed manual or its Sequential Manual Gearbox, a six-speed automated

manual. But some enthusiasts don't enjoy BMW's engineering of its SMG.

Audi, too, makes a fine automated manual, the Direct Shift Gearbox, but there would be too much power going through the driveline to use it here. But it will offer the R-tronic "automatic" sequential manual with the R8 sports car when it goes on sale this fall.

The S6 Tiptronic has a very aggressive Sport mode and steering wheel paddle shifters. The Tip can be used as a traditional automatic with an occasional flip of the paddle shifter for a quick downshift, full paddle-shift mode or Drive Sport mode with paddle shift.

Selecting Sport mode triggers a load-and-lock readiness. It's a game-on move for fast action and the car has the hardware to back it up.

Mammoth, 15.2-inch front disc brakes are treated to black calipers, titanium-gray bracket and S6 badge. The transmission, steering, chassis and brakes have been modified to support the power. And the suspension is set for pushing limits, and sometimes pushes the limits of comfort.

And while the suspension can seem jarring at times, there is no sensation of weight transfer as the car sweeps into a corner. The car is the corner. All the driver has to do is smile and mutter "Wow."

And, oh, the sound of the engine. It has the wail of a monster supercharger and four-barrel carbs gulping aviation fuel. Pull the transmission to Sport and hit the gas. The nearer to redline the sweeter the tone. Click for a downshift and the engine fires off a throttle blip and gear change. The back-pressure rumble from the exhaust is heady.

All-wheel drive? I couldn't tell the difference from rear-wheel drive because chassis balance is engineered for rear-drive bias. In normal driving, the system sends 40 percent of the power to the front wheels and 60 percent to the rear. When traction is questionable, up to 85 percent of the power can go to the rear wheels or as much as 65 percent to the front. Electronic Differential Lock applies brake power to keep traction constant.

It takes just small inputs at the wheel and brake pedal to get desired results. Still, I struggled with the accelerator.

In about 300 miles of driving I couldn't master a smooth roll on of power from a stand still. The electronic throttle - drive-by-wire - doesn't give an absolute response of pushing on the accelerator followed by motion. There is a lag as the accelerator sensor sends input to the main computer followed by a relay to the throttle. Or something like that. And then the power comes on like a switch.

When in the Sport mode, the launch can be positively head banging. Hammer the throttle on takeoff and the S6 leaps into traffic, which can be as unsettling as it is awe-inspiring.

Audi interiors are rich in quality and style, a melding of BMW spartan and Mercedes-Benz formal. Sightlines are uncompromised, there's an enormous trunk and enough back seat legroom for teenagers. Still, the center rear seat is more of a suggestion, compromised by a tall transmission tunnel and stern seatback position.

Audi's Multi-Media Interface, with seven-inch color screen to page through settings for car functions, has evolved and made simpler to use. There are almost-intuitive actions to adjust fan speed, audio selections and other information. It's far better than the BMW iDrive, but not as easy as the Mercedes-Benz Command system.

The \$3,900 Technology package is worth it not just for the navigation system but for the Sirius satellite radio, the rearview camera and Advanced Key, which allows pushbutton starting and lock/unlock without pulling the key from a pocket or purse.

The S6 has a vibe that resonates every time it is started and every time the throttle is pressed. Not all of these supersedans do that. It's not just appearance, it's not just quality features, it's not just the power, it's how Audi brings all these elements together that makes the S6 so satisfying.

Copley News Service

SPECS2007 Audi S6 quattroBody style: midsize, five-passenger all-wheel-drive sport sedan; aluminum hood and fendersEngine: aluminum, DOHC 5.2 liter, direct-injection V-10Horsepower: 435 at 6,800 rpmTorque: 398 foot-pounds at 3,000-4,000 rpm Transmission: six-speed Tiptronic with steering-wheel shiftersAcceleration: 0 to 60 mph, 5.1 seconds; top speed 155 mphEPA fuel economy estimates: 15 mpg city, 21 highwayFuel capacity: 21.1 gallons; 91 octane recommended

DIMENSIONSTrunk space: 15.9 cubic feetFront head/leg/shoulder room: 38.7/41.3/57.1 inches (37.5 with sunroof)Rear head/leg/shoulder room: 37.8/36.9/55.9 inches Length/wheelbase: 193.5/112.1 inches Curb weight: 4,486 pounds

FEATURESStandard equipment includes: automatic dual zone climate control, two-position memory for driver seat-steering wheel-mirrors, one-touch up/down power windows, electronic cruise control, adaptive cruise control, adaptive headlights (rotate up to 15 degrees based on steering / speed, front and rear fog lights, three-spoke multifunction leather-wrapped steering wheel with aluminum shift paddles, power tilt-telescopic steering wheel, high pressure heated and retractable headlight washers, puddle lights in outside mirrors and all doors, front and rear reading lights, overhead front console lighting, front and rear footwell lightingSafety equipment includes: Multistage front air bags, seat-mounted side bags, head air-bag curtains, tire-pressure monitoring

CHASSIS Brakes: vacuum-power-assist four-wheel discs, 15.2-inch front ventilated discs, 13-inch rear; electronic stability program with ABS and electronic rear brake pressure proportioning Steering: vehicle speed-sensitive power rack and pinion; turning circle, 39 feetSuspension: front, four link, anti roll bar, twin-tube-gas-filled shock absorbers; rear, trapezoidal-link, twin-tube-gas-filled shock absorbers Tires and wheels: 265/35 R 19-inch on cast-alloy wheels; full-size spare and matching wheel

PRICINGBase: \$72,720, including \$720 freight charge; price as tested, \$79,070Options on test car: Phantom black pearl-effect paint, \$750; Technology package, \$3,900, includes voice recognition, Advanced Key,

Advanced parking system, navigation system, Sirius satellite radio; carbon fiber inlays, \$400The competition:
BMW M5, Cadillac STS-V, Jaguar XJR, Mercedes-Benz E63 AMG Where assembled: Neckarsulm, Germany

PLUSES: Complete package of power, driving finesse, interior design and prestige; 15.2-inch front brakes,
wow

MINUSES: Slow drive-by-wire accelerator response delays instant gratification. Small vibration in front end.

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