

# Curbside



## AUDI A5 REVIEW

By Anthony B. Barthel

There was a time when I thought we'd stop seeing new coupes altogether, but there seems to be a resurgence and now several vehicle manufacturers have some pretty sexy coupes in their offerings. Among those is Audi, who has a new coupe for 2009 - the A5.

Offered with the company's 3.2 liter V6 pumping out 265 horsepower and 243 lb-ft of torque, the A5 is described by Audi as a four-seat coupe whose biggest asset is sexy styling followed by performance that matches that style.

### What's Hot

When I first got my hands on the A5 one of the first things I noticed was how diminutive the back seat legroom appeared to be. I figured there was no way a "real adult" could get back there, so we decided to do a strange challenge for a coupe. Go air conditioner shopping!

Someone who is the likely candidate for this car is more going to appreciate the performance of the six-cylinder engine, which sits behind the front axle to maximize handling. Further adding fuel to the handling fire is the fact that the tested A5 was the S-Line model, which means slightly lower suspension and additional handling tweaks to give this car

an even sharper edge on those twisty corners.

Like other recently evaluated Audis this one featured a control palette that included a rotary knob on the center console surrounded by buttons. This system controls almost everything imaginable from the navigation system to the audio system. For some functions there are redundant controls on the steering wheel and a few functions, such as radio volume control, have their own dedicated button.

While I'm a huge fan of electronics sometimes these systems get in the way of a car being a car. While the Audi's system takes a little bit of getting used to, people who own this car will quickly become accustomed to the knob and its surrounding array of buttons and will likely be able to control whatever they want without being distracted.

Furthermore, there is a main screen in the instrument panel and a secondary one in the gauge cluster. These two sources of information are a good resource that the driver and the passengers can use for navigation, music or just information about the vehicle.

This car is clearly biased toward performance and a driving environment that rewards those who can find a twisty road and a lack of law enforcement officers. Once you're on that road, you won't be disappointed by the Audi A5.

Tight handling, rewarding performance and a willing and responsive machine are why you would play this game. The form-fitting seats keep everyone where they should be even when the numbers on the speedometer in the car reflect a significantly higher value than what the posted signs recommend.

While taking three of your rather substantial friends for a ride through the mountains to buy an air conditioner isn't exactly what Audi had in mind for a car like the A5, that's just one of the grueling tests we put it through. With two gents over 6' tall sitting behind

one another and myself and a friend behind me, we went shopping for a system to cool and heat a room.

Surprisingly, the Audi's trunk was quite capable of handling the cooler and the interior was very able to keep the four men situated throughout the drive.

### What's Not

From the department of the obvious, this car's coupe body style comes with inherent ingress/egress (getting in and out) challenges. There is nothing unusual about the Audi in this regard, but coupes in general are tougher to get into and out of. Duh.

The back seat is a particular challenge for coupes in general and the button on the front seat that allows either rear seat or front seat occupants to slide the entire seat forward and back was a huge plus. So that the more child-like among us don't annoy front-seat passengers, this functionality only works when the door is open. Smart.

### In Summary

One of the nice things about having a car like the Audi A5 is that you get the kind of performance and fun factor you want in a car of this caliber without seeing yourself on every street corner. The unique styling of this car is a clear indicator of the performance intentions of the chassis without ever being wild or outlandish.

I also like a lot of the little touches that would make living with this car such a nice

experience. For example, little lights under the front seat cushions that light up the rear footwells make it easier to get into and out of the back seat. I also like the fact that when the bright headlights are activated the turn signal stalk remains in the same position as when they're in normal mode.

While the little touches will make the A5 a pleasure to live with for a long journey, what makes the driver smile is finding an open, twisty road, a great station on the radio and some open-window weather and you've got a great day. Although it's better if there's no air conditioner in the trunk. •



# Frankly Plank

By Duane Plank

Catching up on a few of the tidbits that have surfaced in the past week or so while I have been helping coach the Gundo Little League All-Star team. We took the first step on the road to Williamsport by capturing the District 36 championship last weekend. The kids trounced the boys from Palos Verdes 14-3 in the finale to cruise through the tourney 4-0. Next stop is the Sectionals, starting this weekend in Lomita.

Tidbit numero uno: Was taking my nephew Cameron out to get him his much-delayed birthday gift, which turned out to be a defective razor scooter, when nephew Nolan made the off-handed comment that a lot of 50-year-old people were dying. Nice! This was just after the pitch guy Billy Mays passed on the heels of the demise of Michael Jackson. Both were the big 50. Which I turned about three months ago, for those who pay attention. And if you don't pay attention each week, thanks for looking at this little ditty *this* week.

I know it may not be funny to some, but when I heard of the death of the TV salesman, I initially thought that *Willie Mays*, the baseball icon, the "Say Hey Kid," had bought the farm. Guess I should pay better attention.

Reminds me of the time a few years back (2003) when I heard the distressing news that "Palmer" had died. I was in a tizzy until I found out it wasn't golfer Arnold Palmer who had matriculated to the big putting green in the sky—it was musician *Robert Palmer* who entered the pearly gates. Palmer, who crooned *Addicted to Love*, among his other hits, was 54 when he succumbed to a heart attack. And guess what? There was a scramble amongst the family money-grubbers post death, over the singer's estate of 30-million pounds. Which is how much in pesos, folks? I know someone out there in the vast *FP* audience can help me with that one.

Speaking of birthdays, congrats to *Dodger Girl* and hubby on the second birthday of their second-born bambina. The raucous festivities took place a couple of days ago, I believe.

All of the salacious rumors that you heard about actor Joyce DeWitt and her Mayberry arrest for DUI on July Fourth must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. The nearly

60-year-old DeWitt was sent to the hoosegow in the late afternoon on the Fourth, presumably missing the fantastic local fireworks extravaganza at good-old Rec Park. No info on whether Ms. DeWitt made her one allowed call from the friendly confines to has-been actress Suzanne Sommers.

Already writing three columns for this fine publication, and the death of and Staples Center ceremony for the King of Pop really don't fit into any of the columns. So I had to round-file the reams of sarcastic comments that I had concerning Mr. Jackson. Have considered submitting a fourth column—one that would focus on celebrity gossip as well as the late-night escapades of the local citizenry. Am sure that the column would make for some interesting reading, but, as my wife reminds me, "We live in this town."

So I'll just concentrate on what I allegedly do best, and leave most of the celebrity stuff to *TMZ*, and the reporting on the nocturnal adventures of the locals to...hopefully nobody. Wouldn't want to alienate my sources, or burn any bridges, would I?

Gotta pass on this one Jackson joke, though. Which isn't meant at all to the K.O.P., who for some reason, began wearing a single white glove during his appearances many full moons ago.

Any of you baseball guys remember Dodger shortstop Jose Offerman, who played with the Blue Crew from 1990-95? Known more for his batting prowess than defensive ability, Offerman was dealt to the Kansas City Royals in 1996 and finished his MLB career with the New York Mets in '05. Career batting average of .273.

Anyway, the joke going around during Offerman's stay in L.A. was thus: "What do Jose Offerman and Michael Jackson have in common?" Punch line: "They both wear a glove for no apparent reason!"

Get it? See, Offerman struggled mightily on defense, and Jackson...oh, forget it. I am not too swift with the jokes, anyway. Lean more towards the acerbic, smart-ass one-liners and cheap comebacks.

Onward to the morose story of ex-NFL quarterback Steve McNair, who was shot to death by his 20-year-old girlfriend, who

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