

TEST DRIVE: AUDI RS7 QUATTRO TIPTRONIC

We go hands-on with Audi's Intercontinental Ballistic Cruise Missile, the RS7

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Few fitting analogies can apply to Audi's exceptionally batty RS7. Our likening for this 4.0 litre V8 beast? A road-going Intercontinental Ballistic Cruise Missile.

Capable of blazing through the stratosphere at Mach 23 (24,000 km/h) to deliver warheads nearly 10,000km distant, the intercontinental ballistic cruise missile, better known by the acronym "ICBM", became a symbol of power during the Cold War.

In 2013, Audi launched what we can only describe, tongue in cheek, as its own ground-bound ICBM - the RS7.

Targeted directly at competition including the Mercedes CLS63 AMG-S, BMW M6 Gran Coupe and Porsche Panamera Turbo, the seductively-styled RS7 is absolutely mental! As the ultimate iteration of the five-door A7 hatchback coupe, it's the most outrageous Audi currently produced - even more extreme than the R8 V10 Plus. Goggle at these numbers.

The RS7 blasts off from 0 to 100 km/h in just 3.4 seconds and burns down a standard 402-meter drag strip in 11.6 seconds, going on to a terminal velocity of 304 km/h.

To put those figures - acceleration in particular - in context, consider this: From a standing start, the RS7 can stay with or outrun the Chevrolet ZR1 Corvette, Dodge Viper, Ferrari 458 Italia, and even the Ferrari F12 to 100 km/h.



Dial-up Sport mode, place your left foot hard on the brake pedal, depress the throttle until 1900 rpm shows on the tachometer then release the binders. All out warfare breaks loose and 200 km/h arrives before you know it. From there, the RS7 just keeps rocketing forward. The rate at which this 2020 kilogram cruise missile accumulates speed is truly astonishing.

That intensity is courtesy of the cleverly engineered twin-turbocharged 4.0 litre V-8 under its massive bonnet, producing 560 horsepower and 700 Nm of torque. For comparison, that's 10 more horsepower and a whopping 160 Nm of torque more than that produced by the R8 V10 Plus - you know, Audi's supercar.

That ballistic thrust is channeled through a single-clutch eight-speed automatic transmission. Audi's seven-speed double-clutch trans (found in the R8) can't handle the torque. Shifts are quicker than one imagines a traditional torque-converter gearbox can produce, accompanied by a satisfying exhaust burble on upshifts and cannon-shot reports on downshifts.

Nailing the RS7 in a straight line elicits the same gleeful laughter that must have issued from Audi's quattro GmbH engineers in Neckarsulm, Germany when they dreamt up this A7-based projectile. However, when the road turns things get a bit more serious.

Driven up to seven-tenths, the RS7's standard adaptive air suspension copes well with its considerable mass. Beyond that point, even with a trick torque-vectoring rear differential that selectively apportions power to all four massive 53 cm wheels, the sedan rolls and understeers.



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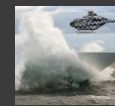


I once had to design a dining room table 'strong enough to dance an Irish jig upon' ... That was quite an unusual brief!

David Linley - bespoke furniture designer

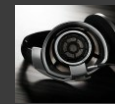
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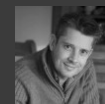
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It's controllable but given the speed at which the car arrives at corners, the RS7's terrifically solid chassis can be overwhelmed. Braking is strong and consistent but the wave-design 38 cm front/35 cm rear rotors work hard to reign in this two-tonne monster. Nearing its limits, this is a car for experienced drivers only.

Remarkably, for all its ferocity, the RS7 is well tamed when cruising about town. Leave it in Touring mode (Sport is the dynamic setting) and enjoy the comparative spaciousness of its handsome cabin. Large leather front chairs with honeycomb stitching echo the sedan's gaping aluminium front grill, providing continent-crossing support while those in the rear accommodate most adults comfortably.

Capped by a perfectly-sized, perforated leather-covered steering wheel and concert hall-quality Bang & Olufsen sound system, the interior is functional and sporting. An optional heads-up display is very useful when streaking toward stratospheric speed while Audi's MMI navigation/information system remains one of the best around.

The RS7 is more clinical than emotional in the way it goes about its business but when the chance to launch on a cross country mission emerges, it's never caught flat-footed on the launch pad. Arm it with a full load of fuel and point it toward the horizon. Just be sure to warn fellow motorists to duck and cover.

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