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DRIVEN: AUDI RS5 COUPÉ

We take the most handsome member of Audi's fast family, the RS5, for a spin

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From time to time, dutiful sons and daughters are called upon to play chauffeur by parents in need of a ride. This was the case for this writer on a recent family reunion weekend at the beach in the neighbouring state of Delaware. Our machine to take the parentally accompanied Atlantic-bound trip, the fastest version of Audi's sexy A5 coupé, which also happens to be the most seductive iteration of the shapely two-door.

For the RS5, the brains at Audi's quattro GmbH - responsible for hotting-up the coupes, hatchbacks, sports cars and estates that roll out of Ingolstadt - stretched the A5's steel body over optional 52 cm wheels, liberally applying creases, vents and honeycomb-mesh grilles.

The effect is visually stimulating and in-keeping with the other members of quattro GmbH's fast family, including the delightfully bombastic RS7 we experienced just before taking the helm of the RS5.

By comparison, the 450 horsepower RS5 seems a good deal more mild-mannered. This is due in part to the fact the RS7 is an order of magnitude more powerful and in part to the more conservative approach Audi took to tuning this comely coupe.

The 4.2 litre V8 under its bonnet is naturally-aspirated, swimming upstream against the trend toward turbocharged powerplants. With 430 Nm of torque underfoot complementing the eight-cylinder's horsepower, the effect of flattening the throttle is attention-getting - 100 km/h arrives in just over four seconds. It's not as loony as the RS7's nearly one second-quicker performance, but grin-inducing nonetheless.



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Cruising the motorway east toward the Delaware coast, the RS5 provides an enjoyable level of comfort by way of standard eight-way adjustable power front seats and a solid chassis underpinning the stylish two-door. Like all modern Audi's, the RS5's cabin was impeccably finished and similarly black. The colour is practically standard for the brand and works well in European climes. Still, in areas where the sun shines frequently it would be refreshing to see more bright interior colours offered. Lighten the hue, lighten the mood.

Audi's MMI navigation/entertainment package works well, particularly for those already familiar with the system. And with the RS5's nicely sized, flat-bottom, three-spoke multi-function steering wheel in hand we dialled up some classic Duke Ellington and left the motorway for the back roads that wind through Maryland and Delaware farmland on route for the Atlantic Ocean.



The RS5's shifts come courtesy of a seven-speed dual clutch transmission. Smooth in its standard setting, the transmission undergoes a Dr. Jeckyll/Mr. Hyde transformation when Sport mode is chosen, holding gears patiently in anticipation of full-throttle acceleration and downshifting eagerly with brake application. Automatic rev-matching on downshifts elicits terrific noises from car's optional sport exhaust.

Pointing the nose toward a section spiced with S-curves and hairpins revealed that the current RS5's electric power steering is more communicative than that found in previous models from quattro's offices in Neckarsulm, but still too dull. Turn-in is good but once initiated, the steering weights up without providing commensurate road feel.

Grip is abundant, aided as in the RS7 by a torque-vectoring rear differential that selectively apportions power, overdriving the outside rear wheel to help rotate the coupe. Together with quattro all-wheel-drive, the system provides secure handling. But with nearly 60 percent of the RS5's 1,832 kilogram weight on the nose, understeer arrives earlier than one would like. As with most modern cars, a diet would sharpen the RS5's handling considerably.

That dynamic demerit melts away however, gliding up to the beach house where this particular road-trip ends. Casting a glance backward while heading for the sand, the truth of this machine is unavoidable - this is the most handsome member of Audi's fast family.

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