

## Hi Stepping in the Audi Coupe

By Roger Witherspoon

There are always risks involved in taking a winning formula and modifying it to come up with something different.

That is especially true of cars, which are, in essence, the largest and most expensive piece of sculpture the average family owns. The decisions made by auto designers as to what to keep and what to throw out, what to emphasize and what to downplay, change the nature of the artwork and affects those who may consider owning it.

There is a relationship one has with a vehicle: how it makes them feel when they look at it, or stand next to it, or sit down and merge with its interior lines and comfort zones. Then, of course, comes the issue of how well it performs and meets the needs of the owner.

In this case, Audi's sedans have long set standards for performance, styling, technology and comfort. Whether one starts with the compact Audi A-4 in the upper \$30,000 range or drop six figures and slide into the long, luxurious, Audi A-8, one can expect speed, agility, and superior road handling; a sleek but not overpowering style which appeals to both male and female motorists; a sophisticated, rather than rakish décor, and plenty of leg and head room. And one finds these qualities throughout all the Audi family of sedans.

But now comes the Audi A-5, a two door sport coupe stepping away from the family-oriented sedan in favor of an upscale hot rod for two. But in this case, stepping away from the flow was not a step back, though the coupe is definitely, defiantly, different.

The A-5 experience starts with the grill. It is wider and meaner than the traditional Audi face greeting you. The four interlocking circles in the deep black grill are more like the grin of a circling shark than a variant of the interlocking rings marking the warm and fuzzy Olympic signature. The hood is low and wide, with wrap-around, side-projecting headlights which conjure the four wheeled image of silver wrap-around shades on a Harley Davidson rider. It is tough, aggressive, masculine, sleek and decidedly no-nonsense.

The grill is the introduction to a long silhouette ending in a short, stubby rear. The dominant features on the sides are the 19-inch aluminum, five-spoke wheels sticking out from huge wells that emphasize the low height of the car and add to its predatory image.

Inside, there is an obligatory back seat which is comfortable enough for small children. But there is little leg and head room, and it is better suited for briefcases and small packages. The seats can fold down with the touch of a button, however, enlarging a trunk already designed to hold enough luggage for a week's vacation for two.

The design is everything one comes to expect in a \$50,000 vehicle. The leather seats are deep, padded, wide, comfortable, power adjustable, and heated or cooled. There are storage compartments for coffee cups, water bottles, cell phones, and CDs. The entertainment center is powered by a 505-watt, 14-speaker, Bang & Olufsen sound system which was equally adept with the soft jazz violins of Keiko Matsui or the

brashness of Usher. It can be operated from the wood grain console or the fingertip controls on the leather steering wheel.

In addition to the six-disc, in-dash, CD player, the A-5 comes with an iPod interface, AM/FM and Sirius Satellite Radio, and Bluetooth cell phone connection. Its navigation system is not touch-screen, but the computer control system is intuitive and easy to operate.

The A-5 has a sun roof but, surprisingly for a car in this price range, it tilts but does not slide open. This was part of the tug-of-war between the American and German designers which, in the end, the German team won. Europeans do not particularly like the wind blowing in their faces, since it interferes with their smoking cigarettes and cigars. As a result, they may have a glass roof, but it doesn't open, and they have large cigar holders, but no cup or bottle holders. Jaguar, for example, solved that problem by offering an extra smokers' package for Americans who want them but, otherwise, having large cup and bottle holders and roofs that let the sun and wind in as their standard interior. Audi, on the other hand, gave the nod to the European styling, with a couple of pop-up, wobbly cup holders and large, attractive ash trays. For those who don't smoke, it's an expensive annoyance.

On the safety side, the Coupe's high density, Bi-Xenon headlights swivel as the front wheels turn to follow the road – which is really useful on dark, winding country byways.

But if the A-5 is to be successful, it will have to make its mark on the road as a sports car. And here, the verdict varies between good and better. The basic A5 comes with a V-6 engine capable of cranking out 265 horsepower – which is enough to push the Coupe to 130 miles an hour. That's fast enough to earn a license suspension, though it doesn't particularly turn heads in the sports car world. Audi does offer a big brother model, however, with a V-8 engine pushing 354 horsepower and topping out at road running 155 miles per hour. And where the smaller engine jump starts the A5 from 0 to 60 miles per hour in a decent but average time of 5.8 seconds, the V-8 will rock you back into your heated or air cooled seat as it jumps from 0 to 60 in just 4.9 second. The difference, however, will cost you about \$10,000.

But at any speed, the Audi A5 is a comfortable, sleek, sporty-looking, head turner of a car providing a fast chariot for a weekend getaway for two.

## **2008 Audi A-5 Coupe**

<b>MSRP:</b>		<b>\$50,340</b>
<b>EPA Mileage:</b>	<b>16 MPG City</b>	<b>27 MPG Highway</b>
<b>Performance/ Safety:</b>		
	<b>0 – 60 MPH</b>	<b>5.8 Seconds</b>
	<b>Top Speed</b>	<b>130 MPH</b>

3.2-Liter DOHC aluminum alloy V-6 engine producing 265 horsepower and 243 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed manual transmission; permanent all wheel drive; 19-inch, 5-spoke, alloy wheels; five-link front suspension; independent trapezoidal-link rear suspension; antilock brake system; self-leveling and adaptive Bi-Xenon headlights; rearview camera;

rack & pinion steering; driver & front passenger front airbags; seat-mounted side airbags; side curtain airbags.

**Interior / Comfort:**

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; Bang & Olufsen, 505-watt premium sound system with 14 speakers, including 4 tweeters and 1 subwoofer; 6-disc, in-dash CD player; iPod interface; Bluetooth cell phone connection; navigation system; leather seats; heated front seats; tilt and telescoping, leather steering wheel; fingertip audio, telephone and cruise controls; tilting sun roof.