

Turbo Charged Ridge Running

In the Audi TT

By Roger Witherspoon

It was a wonderful stretch of mountain highway

The sun was high, the air was clear and the two lanes were a paved series of scenic straight-aways above picturesque valleys and meandering rivers interrupted with the kind of curves – sometimes long and lazy, sometimes extra sharp – that pull people from cities in search of rustic wonderlands. It's a pleasant enough attraction for those seeking a leisurely afternoon drive.

But on this occasion, the road through the upper Hudson River Valley screamed for performance and speed – not a country stroll. With the push of a button, the soft cloth top lifted up over the Audi TT Roadster and disappeared in a closed bin behind the seats. With another, the soothing sound of Miles disappeared and, in his place, Usher began to make the nine speakers of the Bose sound system vibrate and his shout of “Yeah!” reverberated off of the mountainside.

A flick of the wrist shifted the transmission from a six-speed automatic to a manual mode and activated the paddle shifts attached to the steering wheel. The road was empty as the pedal went to the floor. The twin turbos began to purr, shifting to a low roar as the engine revved higher and the TT shot forward, getting louder as I rapidly shifted through the gears with the touch of the upward paddle, quickly hitting triple digits on the straight road.

The front wheel drive roadster had taken off with a jump, but there was none of the skittishness or sway that characterized earlier versions of the Double T, and the back wheels did not jump and slide over bumpy pavement. Unlike its solid steel predecessors, the 08 model has a primarily aluminum body – with steel reinforcement at the rear – and the weight has been more evenly distributed. In addition, the new TT is about three inches wider than its predecessor – giving it a stance closer to its heavier competitors, the Nissan 350 Z, BMW Z-4, and Porsche Boxter – as well as more stability on the road.

The first in a series of lazy S-curves approached, and I tapped the downshift paddle to fourth gear and cut speed to about 90 as I hit the lightly banked curves flanked by trees on one side of the road and open air and valley below on the other. The TT stayed in its lane, the wider road racing tires holding the road in a superglue grip as I zipped through the mountains, finally leaving the curves and leveling off for another straight stretch of road running.

The new Audi TT Roadster is a basically fine roadster known more for styling than performance: its limited power made it too light to fight in a straight away race, and its lack of balance made it too thin to win on the curves. But it was a pretty roadster, a no-nonsense, simple flowing design marred by a fixed spoiler which failed to give it any traction on curves or bumpy roads.

It still has a trim shape, though it now ends with the bare hint of a spoiler which rises when the speed exceeds 75 miles per hour. But the wider stance stretched the grill into a more aggressive looking grimace with a hint of power. The Double T comes in two flavors: the four cylinders, 200-horsepower, front wheel drive model with twin turbochargers to boost its performance, and a six cylinder, 250-horsepower, all wheel

drive model. The smaller engine on the \$44,000 TT pushes the car from 0 – 60 miles per hour in 6.3 seconds, which is .3 seconds and \$10,000 less than the BMW Z-4 roadster. The TT with the 3.2-liter engine zips from 0 to 60 in just 5.6 seconds, but pretty much matches the BMW the \$54,000 price range.

At the top of the speed range, however, the BMW will run at 150 miles per hour, while the TTs top out at 130. So while the Audis will jump off to a quicker start, the drivers will not be able to gloat for long.

Inside, the TT was also received a face lift, beginning with the leather and suede, heated bucket seats and the Bose sound system. It was missing a navigation system and satellite radio, which is a surprise in a vehicle in this price range and a staple with its competing roadsters.

But for the simple enjoyment of looking good, losing the roof and going on a long country cruise, or for the an adrenaline rush on a deserted street drag strip, the TT isn't a bad way to travel.

2008 Audi TT Roadster 2.0

MSRP:		\$41,425
EPA Mileage:	22 MPG City	29 MPG Highway
As Tested Mileage:		19 MPG Mixed

Performance/ Safety:

0 – 60 MPH	6.3 Seconds
Top Speed	130 MPH

2.0-Liter DOHC, turbo charged 4-cylinder engine producing 200 horsepower and 207 pound-feet of torque; S-tronic, 6-speed automatic dual clutch gearbox; 18-inch alloy wheels; McPherson strut front suspension; four-link rear suspension; electronic stabilization program; anti-lock brakes; automatic rear spoiler; dual chrome-tipped exhaust pipes; dual threshold and knee airbags; seat mounted, thorax side airbags; fog lights.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/ FM radio; Bose 9-speaker, 140-watt sound system; 3-spoke, leather wrapped steering wheel; paddle shifts; power retractable hood; 10-way power, heated seats; 6-disc, in-dash CD player.