



## Audi Goes Electric....Presenting the 2016 A3 e-Tron Sportback

Audi has launched its first plug-in hybrid in the US. This week test vehicle is the A3 Sportback e-Tron ultra. This is the perfect vehicle to mark the brand's new commitment to an electric lifestyle.

It is an affordable car, and with a sub-\$40,000 starting price, stepping into the A3 e-Tron will help get people into the world of luxury and plug-in vehicles.

Audi packaged the guts of the A3 e-Tron in such a way so as not to intrude on the hatchback's interior. Even so, the e-Tron already boasts more functionality than the standard A3, thanks to the Sportback body style. The lithium-ion battery sits below the rear bench seat, and with the second row seats up, the trunk offers 13.6 cubic feet of cargo space. The 10.6-gallon fuel tank is seated below the floor of the cargo area, so there's no room for a spare tire. Instead, Audi provides a patch kit behind a side panel in the trunk. It's a small sacrifice to be able to make full use of the cargo area and the fold-flat rear seats. But this really helps maintain the versatility of the A3 e-Tron. Not only does the car have the range, but it also has the space to make the most of those weekend trips out of town.

Sitting inside the car, it is clear this is an Audi. It has the fit and finish we expect from a luxury vehicle. Where previous iterations of the A3 felt like they had more in common with Volkswagens, this car has its own personality. Touch points have a premium feel. When driving, the quietness helps make the car feel special, and the smoothness of the ride and drivetrain are examples of what one would expect from a tech-savvy Audi. There's a little extra weight from the battery pack, but the suspension does a good job of keeping it unnoticeable while driving.

While parent company VW deals with emission scandal. This a perfect time for Audi to breakaway into the electric marketplace

The A3 e-Tron is powered by a 1.4-liter TFSI gasoline engine, coupled with a 75-kilowatt electric motor and an 8.8-kWh lithium ion battery pack. The electric motor/generator is housed between the internal combustion engine and the S-Tronic six-speed dual-clutch transmission. The hybrid system runs the electrical components, which means no alternator, and the electric motor also works as the starter motor for the ICE.

The battery pack is made up of eight-cell modules with 12 cells apiece. A liquid cooling system is located at the bottom of the battery to keep it operating under optimal temperatures. The battery is meant to last the life of the vehicle, and is covered under an eight-year/100,000-mile warranty.

The turbocharged four-cylinder alone offers 150 horsepower and 184 pound-feet of torque. The electric motor offers 102 hp and 243 lb-ft of torque. Working together, total system output is rated at 204 hp and 258 lb-ft. The A3 E-Tron has a top speed of 130 mph, and it can go up to 80 mph in EV mode.

For drivers who enjoy having as much control as possible over the car's energy usage, there are four electric drive modes. Hybrid mode is the go-to selection for most driving conditions – the car makes all the decisions about how to most efficiently use electric power, gasoline, or a combination of the two. In EV mode, as one would expect, the car is powered only by the electric motor. Hold battery mode reserves as much of the charge as possible. The car may still use electric power in some situations, but it will save a lot of the charge for later usage. In Charge Battery mode, the car takes any opportunity it can to charge the battery. This mode is also optimized for highway driving.

The A3 e-Tron includes Audi's usual Drive Select feature, but here, it only governs the steering feel. Despite the e-Tron technology, this car very much drives like your typical A3. Once underway, it's easy to forget there's all that fancy, science project technology at work. The gas engine and electric motor work together seamlessly. You don't have to know about things like the car's "gliding" capability that disengages the transmission when there's no throttle input in order to appreciate the driving experience

The brakes feel solid, and the recuperation isn't off-putting. It's easy to drive, and it feels

totally natural in the city and on the highway, regardless of EV mode settings. Like all Audi products it feels light and nimble although I miss the AWD Quattro system. I enjoy Audi's MMI multimedia interface system and the interior is quite Audi like in every way. The leather however could have been of higher quality in my opinion.

The one thing that might feel a bit foreign to new plug-in drivers is the "% Power" gauge that replaces the usual tachometer on the left side of the instrument panel. Based on where the needle is pointing, it tells the driver if the car is charging, being driven efficiently, or if the electric and gas motors are being used together to offer boost. Between the two main gauges is a digital display that can be used to show a variety of information including power flow, cruise control settings and, yes, a tachometer readout.

Included with the car is a mobile charger with 120- and 240-volt cables. There's no need to purchase a wall charger, though Audi does offer a sleek wall cabinet to provide a more permanent home for the charger. The A3 e-Tron's charging port is hidden behind the Audi badge on the grille, so it doesn't matter which side of the car the charger is on. On 120 volts, a full charge takes about eight hours. With a 240-volt source, the waiting time drops to about two hours and 15 minutes. A full charge offers about 16 to 17 miles of all-electric driving while the total driving range is over 400 miles. Audi estimates a rating of about 83 miles per gallon equivalent, and for the gasoline engine alone, about 33 mpg in the city, 37 mpg highway, and 35 mpg combined.

If needed it can be driven without any plugging it at all which is huge advantage over pure electric vehicles in emergency situations and for one car family households. One word of caution when filling the gas tank you must push a button near the gas cap releases pressure in the gas tank. As this journalist found out the hard way without reading the owner's manual or reading the small print inside the fuel filler door if you do not de-pressurize the gas tank the fuel you pump in will come flying out. In my over 20 years of weekly press car experience I never had this experience before so it was quite a shock.

The Audi A3 Sportback E-Tron starts at \$37,900 for the Premium Plus trim, including \$925 for destination. My test vehicle also included the technology package and 18 wheels for a total sticker price of \$46,100. Minus of course federal and certain state tax credits.

If you are in the market to plug in with you next vehicle purchase check out the A3 e-Tron for a fun stylish alternative.

## **Front Engine-FWD**

### **Highlights**

Fuel Economy

Styling

Standard and Available Equipment  
Great packaging of interior space  
120 and 220 Volt plug in cables included

**Lowlights**

No Quattro  
Leather a little too vinyl like

**The Long Drive Ratings**  
**Scale 1 low-10 High**

Exterior Styling 7  
Interior styling and quality 8  
Handling 6  
Braking 6  
Fuel Economy 9  
Stereo System 7  
Navigation Accuracy 8  
Performance 5  
Trunk-Cargo Capacity 7  
Value 8