

# Ready for anything

Story and photos by Joe Sage



Leaving the comfort of the Valley in midwinter is a debatable idea. But our Audi A5 quattro was scheduled for the holiday season, and we mentioned that we might take it and head north. So Audi was thoughtful enough to pull off the all-wheel-drive coupe's standard all-season tires (the Premium Plus model's already upgraded 19-inchers) and install some full-blown mud and snows: specifically Dunlop SP Winter Sport 3D Extra Load M+S in 255/35 R19 size with a V speed rating (149 mph). If these don't say "bring it on," we don't know what does.

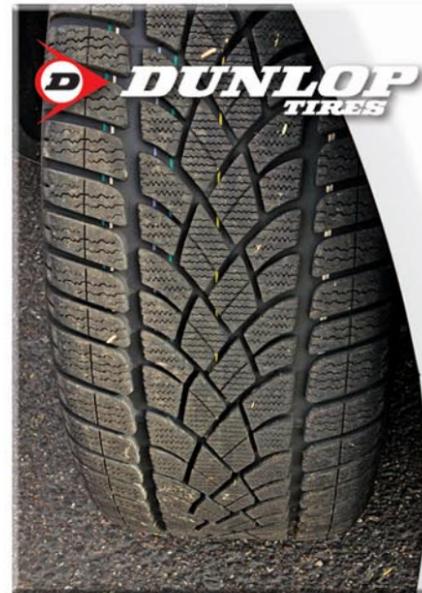
We had tentatively considered giving this combination about an 1800-mile run, through northern Arizona, up through the Navajo Nation and Monument Valley, through Utah's red rock canyon country, then into north-west Colorado—probably four days of driving and two days of being there, if we did it in good weather. (The car arrived with 1735 miles on the odo, so if we were to take this trip, we'd be about doubling that.)

The paradox was a familiar one: we wanted bad weather—perfect for testing the Audi's quattro magic—but big winter storms would likely make the trip take even more time than we had available. With one eye on the forecast, we might have a couple of days to decide.

## Cabin fever

The driver-centric cockpit of an A5 is standard top-notch Audi. Heated seat controls are a simple one-touch for full-blast, with two lower settings from there—perfect for our intended winter adventure. Synchronization of climate for driver and passenger still requires going deep into the menu, but the system includes pollen and pollutant filters, as well as separate vents for any rear seat passengers (it'd be a tight fit for those). The 12-way power sport seats took some adjusting, but that is then saved in the key's memory, and they also have four-way power lumbar support. Our car lacked keyless entry and start, included on the top Prestige trim level but optional (for \$550) on this middle Premium Plus model.

Our Premium Plus stickers at almost four grand more than the base Premium model. Prestige would add about six grand more to that. Some elements of those differ-



entials can be added incrementally as individual options; some not. One thing we would upgrade is the audio (our car did have a \$3050 MMI/nav system that included audio, okay but nothing special). Audi has moved from Bose to Bang & Olufsen for their upper-end systems, and a 12-speaker 505-watt B&O system is available for just \$850 (with or without the pricier nav basis).

## The power of four

As fate would have it, we got into the Audi A5 straight out of a rally drive in an Audi S5—a first-year V8 with 354 hp. The differences are not surprising, really, but you are aware of them because the layout feels exactly the same behind the wheel. The A5 with its inline-4 is lighter and feels quicker, or at least a different kind of quick, while serving up the surge of a turbo, without the growl of the V8. (A current S5 has a supercharged V6 with 333 hp.) The A5's 211-hp two-liter turbo has a light growl similar to the Audi allroad (see our Nov/Dec 2012 issue). That had sounded a little strained at times in the allroad, but in this implementation it does not.

A light feeling in the steering might be attributable to this smaller four-cylinder engine, but probably more-so to its electromechanical power system. Those can feel detached, as well, but this one felt connected.

We felt no turbo lag in the north valley (1700 feet or so elevation) and wondered whether we would notice any at altitude. We didn't want these snow tires going to waste, so we figured there was a very good chance we'd see some altitude, whether it be Colorado or simply a dash to Payson or Prescott. To jump ahead in our story, the answer is no: we never even really thought about the possibility of turbo lag again.

Ultimately, we scratched the 1800-mile Colorado holiday road trip idea. But we had been keeping an eye on the weather apps, and by December 24, a decent winter storm was due to hit northern Arizona. Hot dog. This put an icy road adventure within range, despite heavy holiday traffic, so we prepared to head north to Flagstaff, where it was supposed to snow all afternoon.



## 2013 AUDI A5 2.0T

ENGINE	2.0L inline-4 turbo
HP	211
LB-FT	258
DRIVETRAIN	quattro all-wheel drive
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
WEIGHT	3681 lb
MPG (EST)	22/32/26 (city/hwy/comb)
FUEL TANK	16.1 gallons
FUEL	premium unleaded gasoline

BASE PRICE .....\$37,850

A5 PREMIUM PLUS MODEL: auto-dim heated mirrors, iPod interface, Bluetooth® phone prep, heated front seats w/ driver memory, garage door opener, xenon lighting w/ LED DRL and taillights.....\$3,550

AUDI MMI NAVIGATION PLUS PACKAGE: CD/DVD player, HD radio, nav w/ voice-control, color info display, parking system and rear camera, Audi connect/online, Bluetooth® streaming audio.....\$3,050

19" 10-SPOKE WHEELS .....\$800

SPORT PACKAGE: Front sport seats w/ 4-way power lumbar, sport suspension .....\$750

POLISHED EXHAUST TIPS .....\$140

DESTINATION .....\$895

TOTAL .....\$47,035

TIRES .....Dunlop SP Winter Sport 3D 255/35 R19 96V Extra Load M+S

Developed for sports cars, coupes and sedans with factory-equipped low-profile tires on large diameter alloy wheels. Dunlop's reactive silica mixing process—with directional tread to avoid hydroplaning, and three different types of high-density sipes to maintain traction on wet and slush-covered roads—enables the tread compound to provide high elasticity at low temps for dependable grip on dry, wet and snow-covered roads in winter conditions. Structure includes twin steel belts reinforced by Dunlop's Joint-Less Band (JLB) of nylon to optimize contact patch and minimize tire growth at high speed.

MSRP \$383 x4.....\$1532

## Weather? Ha.

On Monday, December 24, as crazed holiday shoppers jammed the streets, freeways and parking lots with last-minute missions of joy, we hit I-17 north out of Phoenix. By the time we reached Bloody Basin, we were starting to get what we had set out for: bad weather, at least a lot of wet. This stretch came with its own dose of bad traffic: not fast, just crazy. We were at about 3000 feet elevation and climbing steeply (where highway signs warn to "have A/C off to not overheat" in summer). The A5 had all the power we could want, as we climbed. The turbo in motion had all the reserve power on tap we could need. We were not even wishing for that V8 we had just swapped from.

In the early days of the Bridgestone Winter Driving School in Colorado, their slogan said something like, "it's snowing, cold, slippery, and visibility is horrible... a great day for a drive!" This was our mission this day—to find weather bad enough to fully challenge our Dunlop snows. The outside temp dropped to 41 degrees, then rose to 48, as we got within about 25 miles of Munds Park. We had already done well in all sorts of other wet conditions, but were still in search of a snowstorm.

By Schnebley Hill Road, the surface was getting worse, with lots of slush and an outdoor temperature reading of exactly 32 degrees—exactly the worst possible temperature, where the white stuff is part frozen and part liquid. This is the goop that can grab your tires and pull you wherever it wishes, but the Audi A5 quattro with our Dunlop mud and snows was tracking just fine. And this was good, as by that point we were sharing the road with a wide mix of license plates from all over, with people driving every possible speed on their Christmas Eve home stretch. We needed instant response, maneuverability and grip, to stay out of blind spots at least as well as we would in good conditions, and the car delivered.

Next after the run of slush, we found ourselves with left wheels on black—could be pavement, could be ice, even moment to moment—and right wheels on white, now definitely fully frozen, putting the electronic stability and quattro all-wheel-drive systems to the test.

We expect any Audi quattro to come through on all sorts of surfaces, but sportier models like the A5, with bigger wheels, wider tires, lower stance and higher torque can stretch the limits. Not a problem. The A5's suspension is snug and delivers a driver's feel.

In Flagstaff, we had slush and snow, along with fellow travelers of every skill level to dodge. South of Flag, the weather was picking up again, and we departed the Interstate for a variety of ranch and park roads. We got the Audi axle-deep out here, but never bogged down.

The Dunlops were a pretty significant investment for just one afternoon and evening of serious driving, but test duration aside, they were a wise investment.

Most people in urban Arizona would first think of either performance or all-weather tires. But if you have regular trips into serious winter weather, real mud and snows are still the way to go. The Dunlops did well on dry pavement—on I-17 in high-speed downhill stretches, we could hear and feel a little effect of the snows, but very little. As we crossed back down into Maricopa County, the pavement changed and any tire noise went silent. We had a stretch of concrete, and could hear that, then passed back onto silent asphalt, then noisy asphalt. We suspect we've gotten used to rubberized asphalt in the Valley, regardless of tire type. On balance, you wouldn't forgo these if you have real snow driving to do.

We took the Audi A5 on a trip with a serious mix of conditions. We asked ourselves what we might prefer to drive instead. You could have more ground clearance, but we didn't need it. This was lacking back doors, which we didn't need. It was lacking an automatic transmission, the lack of which was our favorite part of all, although that is available. It was lacking summer tires, very much on purpose, which would have been a bad idea on this trip. So yes, ultimately our A5 lacked nothing. And proved itself ready for anything. ■

