

Phantom black powerhouse

We've met Audi's new smallest four-door on the previous pages. Now let's take a look at their flagship sedan, at four times the price of the A3. With the A8 L 4.0T, Audi continues its successful trend of ever more power and performance from ever smaller engines with ever better fuel economy—although this 4-liter takes a step back toward a larger engine and more power, yet still pretty well maintaining its MPG.

A year ago, we reported on the A8 L 3.0T, with a 3-liter V6 producing 333 hp (and 325 lb-ft of torque), rated at 18/28/21 MPG (city/hwy/comb). This year's test car, with its 26 percent advantage in horsepower (and 37 percent in torque) still rates about 90 percent the fuel mileage of that 3.0T (also still available). The 4.0T costs 40 percent more, as outfitted (though only eleven percent more, base).

And yes, this one is outfitted to beat the band. Despite its lofty aura in base trim, our tester required quite a list of add-ons to deliver its full dose of magic (see sidebar).

By Joe Sage

The car is a beauty—a pleasure to inhabit and potent on the road, especially once you shift its 8-speed Tiptronic from D to S.

The interior is very rich, very distinctive and very well-matched, with leather atop the dash, soft-touch materials on the lower face, dark wood across the center stretch, alcantara door inserts, more leather, more wood and gloss brown in the center console

There are still S8 and W12 models above this one. Depending what kind of budget you're on and what kind of mood you're in, it's worth noting that the options at right total some \$32,350—more than the A3's base price. If cost is no object—or indeed the whole point—you will have a ball outfitting and taking delivery of your new A8 L. Or you could take another good look at the base A8 and grab a new A3 for the kids (or grab a world cruise).

Nonetheless, the A8 L is a car you'd rather be driving than sitting at home, with or without any real purpose, and within a block you know you could happily drive it forever. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE ...4.0L TFSI V8 w cylinder on demand
 POWER420 hp / 444 lb-ft torque
 TRANSMISSION8-spd Tiptronic
 DRIVETRAINquattro all-wheel drive
 WHEELS/TIRES15-spoke 19", 255/45
 MPG.....16/26/19 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE.....**\$87,600**
 PHANTOM BLACK PEARL EFFECT:.....incl
 BALAO BROWN INTERIOR:.....incl
 DESIGN SELECTION PACKAGE: Full leather, brushed aluminum inlays, white alcantara leather, fine grain ash inlays, white stitching and piping, dual pane glass8500
 BANG & OLUFSEN SOUND SYSTEM:6300
 PREMIUM PACKAGE: Side assist, 22-way climate/massage seats, LED headlights4000
 REAR SEAT COMFORT PACKAGE: Power/massage outboard seats, front passenger seat adjustment from back3500
 SPORT PLUS PACKAGE: Adaptive air suspension, quattro with sports differential, dynamic steering3500
 DRIVER ASSISTANCE PACKAGE: Adaptive cruise with stop/go, pre sense, lane assist, top view cameras, high-beam assistant.....3250
 PANORAMIC SUNROOF:1300
 WHEEL UPGRADE: 20" 10-double-spoke ..1200
 COLD WEATHER PACKAGE: Heated steering wheel w shift paddles, heated rear seats, rear seat pass-through w ski bag800
 DESTINATION CHARGE:.....895
TOTAL.....\$120,845



A8: built to dominate.



LOGBOOK NOTES

The auto start-stop feature (generally not one of our favorite things) is one of the smoothest we've encountered, all the more remarkable with a longitudinal engine.

The inside rearview mirror is just a little too small. We keep moving our head around, wishing it were about an inch bigger.

The long-wheelbase A8 performed a boulevard U-turn with room to spare, though it felt as though it was at its limits. Surprisingly, its actual turning circle turns out to be 41.7 feet, one of the bigger we've driven.

