

# S: sweet spot or a bit short? By Joe Sage

The 3.0L V6 turbo Audi S4 sedan puts out 354hp—exactly the same as their 4.2L naturally aspirated V8 ten years ago (though the smaller turbo has more torque, 369 lb-ft to the V8’s 325)—but is rated 30 mpg hwy (to the V8’s 21 manual or 22 automatic). The current S4 is only available with an 8-speed Tiptronic automatic (while, somewhat ironically to the sports-minded, a regular A4 can be had with a manual).

The S4’s \$50,900 base price (for Premium Plus, the lower of two available trims) is reasonable enough, but our sample was \$65,625 out the door.

The first contemporary S-car was the S4 (which was Audi 100-200- or later A6-sized, with the “4” redundantly referring to its quattro system), hitting the US in 1993. Audi S-cars were the top model for awhile, combining potent powertrains, sport suspension and brakes, top premium fitments and various technologies that usually didn’t enter the broader model range until a few years later.

Then came two things to muddy the waters: (a) the RS models; and (b) “S-Line” add-ons for the A-cars. (Similarly to [b], the other Germans now offer M or AMG add-ons on non-M and non-AMG models.) To us, the S-Line add-ons dilute real S-cars, making a non-performance model mimic the real thing, sort of an S-car wannabe, begging a clarification by S-car owners. And the RS cars, more

powerful but at the same time in some ways more spartan—with track days as their prime mission—are priced just enough higher to force the S-cars to leave some headroom in their pricing. (There is no current RS4, but a current RS5 starts at \$69,900 against an S5 at \$54,600.) Features and build are also given headroom from S to RS; for example, RS has a nicely integrated rear deck spoiler, while the S4’s is a bolt-on or glue-on.

This somewhat awkwardly forced price walk seems to be the reason our S4 here is not nearly as complete as an earlier S-car—still needing thousands of dollars of add-ons to have what we would consider S essentials, such as sport suspension, steering, differential, as well as formerly S-typical bits such as carbon atlas inlays (they used to have pure carbon fiber, included), a variety of tech features, and even larger wheels. The 19-inch wheels are a good look, appropriate to the S4 great for dry-road performance, but now they cost extra, and there’s even a more expensive set available. (Plus it’s a quattro, which granted is great for dry-road performance, but the 18-inchers might be better when heading north for a ski weekend.)

We can’t help but think there’s something to be said for skipping all the options. Maybe spring for the suspension and rear diff. Maybe even the 19-inch wheels, although 18-inchers are better suited

## SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE	3.0L turbocharged/TFSI V6
DRIVETRAIN	quattro AWD
HP/TORQUE	354 hp / 369 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	8-spd Tiptronic automatic
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	4.4 sec / 155 mph
SUSPENSION	F&R: five-link independent steel spring; S sport suspension minus 23mm ride height from A4
STEERING	electromechanical speed-sensitive power
BRAKES	vented discs: F 13.8 / R 13.0
WHEELS/TIRES	8.5x18 / 245/5R19 93Y (19 avail)
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	186.8 / 111.2 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.1 ft
LEGROOM (F/R)	41.3 / 35.7 in
CARGO CAPACITY	13.0 cu.ft
WEIGHT	3858 lb
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITY	premium unleaded / 15.3 gal
MPG	21/30/24 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	<b>\$50,900</b>
PRESTIGE PKG:	acoustic glass upgrade, heads-up display, interior LED lighting plus pkg, top view camera, MMI nav plus w touch, Audi connect Prime & Plus trial, virtual cockpit, side assist and pre-sense rear
	4900
S SPORT PKG:	red calipers, sport adaptive damp suspension, sport rear differential
	2500
DRIVER ASSISTANCE PKG:	Adaptive cruise, active lane assist, high beam assist, traffic sign recognition
	1800
FINE NAPPA LEATHER INTERIOR	1250
DYNAMIC STEERING	800
19" WHEEL PKG:	5-spoke V-design, contrast grey
	800
CARBON ATLAS INLAYS	500
COLD WEATHER PKG:	htd rear seats, htd wheel
	500
REAR SIDE AIRBAGS	350
DESTINATION CHARGE	975

**TOTAL \$65,625**

to snow duty. But maybe just get the 354-hp powertrain for \$50,900 base price. ■

