

2005 Audi A6 4.2 quattro AT6
Welche Weise zum Autobahn?
By David Ray, Hooked On Driving
For: The Wheel

Don't know German? If you drive this car for very long – you're bound to get a real good understanding of their passion for automobiles, if not their language. What does the title mean? "Which way to the autobahn?" Are you surprised at that? Shouldn't be – this car needs to stretch its legs and I guess the radar detector is one option, however we don't recommend that. Bottom line: This is a long-legged, nimble and powerful car that has a substantial presence and carries its road hugging weight with style and grace. The A6 has been evolving for several years now, with enthusiasts not even noticing this mid-sized sedan until recently. The 2005, and the 4.2 liter V8 will change that. Not only has the performance been on a geometric rise, but its appearance has become more refined, with the 2005 model making its boldest statement yet. Audi has stepped out with a strong personality expressed by its new front fascia, which may be one step over the top. We studied this new set of teeth for a week and decided it was interesting, but would like to see the same nose without the chrome accents. I fear that they were making an accommodation to the American market with this, and it's the one thing that doesn't look great on the car.

Climb into the driver's seat of this four door and you will be treated to one of the best seats we've found. Not that it's a racing Recaro – no...but Audi has found a shape that wraps up to your shoulders and a texture of leather that literally hugs you. Even during spirited cornering I felt secure and comfortable. And for long road trips, this interior is the Bombe. This is one of the cars we'd most want to drive to Des Moines for the class reunion. OK – admitting to being spoiled, we NEED the seat heaters and we were shocked to find them missing on this model. On the other hand, one of the best features of the interior is the combination of a great seat, with many adjustments available, and a tilt/telescope steering wheel that resulted in the perfect driving position – something that we rarely find in any street car. With a sprouting teenager as my real world test for back seat space and headroom, the A6 gets an A+ for a car supposedly in the mid-size range. As the roofline of the new Audis have been stretched a bit from its perfect arch motif of earlier in the century, they've addressed the rear headroom concern with a later drop of the roofline, which also gives the car a more elegant stance when viewing it from the outside. Trunk space is enough to accommodate extra passengers, not mention plenty of bags for four or five passengers. Kudos to Audi for a full sized spare wheel and tire to match the nice 17" spokes riding on the outside.

If you have read the Hooked On Driving reviews regularly, you will already know that we're in protest mode on the nav/systems control panels that were obviously a response to the millions of consumers who have protested for years on how difficult car radios and air conditioners have been to operate. At first, I tried to believe that the Audi had learned from the BMW iDrive nightmare, but no – they're trying the same stuff and doing it just a bit better. Can anyone tell me how I get from the "static" radio settings, to the "dynamic" radio settings? You've got to be kidding! There were some useful features

once you became accustomed. Like the on/off volume switch for the radio on the console about where your right hand rests when not on the wheel – good idea. But the overall interface and difficulty in using the radio just isn't worth the effort they've expended. It is a classic case of the techno gang bragging about how many layers of functionality they can provide in addition to the basic sound and climate control systems – but I just want to select mode, band, station or track – that's all. If I want a navigation system, I'll get a Hertz Neverlost that is not integrated into all other systems. I don't need a supercomputer! The last complaint about this otherwise incredible automobile – they have, you guessed it: a power glove box door – yup. What's more, inside the glove box is a CD player, not a glove box. Actually, I guess we've come full circle – there's only room for a pair of gloves under the CD player. There is so much stuff in the dash that they've lost the ability to offer the 6 disc in-dash stacker that everyone likes and is provided in Hondas, Volkswagens and, well you get the point.

On the road with the A6, the 4.2, DOHC five valves per cylinder V8 with 335 HP comes on a strong and steady pull, but in street driving, we were just a bit disappointed when we punched it and put the 6 speed to work. Driving the A6 on the street, the V8 did not impress. Very nice, but with the 6 speed automatic shifting every time I blinked, it seemed to be a steady and strong performer but nothing special. The 6 speed has obvious economy advantages, but it sometimes gets on one's nerves. It will shift through to third gear before you're going 20 miles per hour. And it can be luggy when you need to step on it from a slow speed. On the other hand, the car went into a Jekyll/Hyde transition as I kicked in the tiptronic sport mode and picked up the pace. I'd swear the software designers had me figured out. I could almost hear the critters under the hood saying, "We'd better get to work, this guy's in a hurry!" In this performance situation, the A6 comported itself flawlessly. In fact, it's downright quick in this mode and can pull a 6.0 second 0-60 mph clip. With a four link front suspension and a "trapezoidal link" rear suspension (who said high school geometry was worthless?), it is clear that Audi has cured some of the push that traditionally comes with the 4000lb+ sedan. While we didn't get the A6 to the track, a spirited canyon blast found very solid front end bite on the turn-in and very good steering feel as I rotated the car and fed the throttle on. I drove the car at what I felt was the limit of appropriate civilized behavior on the public roads and it handled everything I dished out without a complaint. I'm not sure whether your intrepid reporter is losing his edge, but getting a chirp out of these tires on a canyon road was even stretch. This is a fast car and I felt very safe pushing it.

Retail on this roomy rod is \$56K – not small change, but I must admit that it feels at home in this price range. With one of our sentimental favorites the CTS-V, just under this range, all I can say is that if you can afford to be shopping in this category, it's hard to go wrong. With BMW and Mercedes pitching in with excellent entries, you should spend more time than in the past on your search. By all means, the sport/luxury sedan is no longer the exclusive domain of the BMW 5 series. While the 5 is still awesome, you'd better plan some time to consider the competition. In the past, you might have considered the Audi to be a specialty or niche player, this is no longer true. As they have largely mitigated the negatives from the all-wheel drive and maximized the positives, the A6 4.2 may have stepped to the front of the class.