

**2004 Audi TT Coupe
Quattro DSG6
By David Ray, Hooked On Driving
For: The Wheel**

From David Bowie's "Ground Control to Major Tom"...."Though I'm passed one hundred thousand miles, I'm feeling very still, and I think my spaceship knows which way to go....."

This is a story that goes beyond that of a simple car review. Yes, this is just a local enthusiast publication called "The Wheel." But from members of this club and readers of this article come the grass roots of automotive development into the future. Enthusiast's input and reaction to product in the market will have a huge say in what we will be driving in five, ten, and twenty five years. I start this review of the Audi TT DSG6 Coupe in this unusual way because I perceive this car as the wave of the future. So our reaction to the wave of the future becomes important, and our only opportunity to effect it.

The Audi TT is an amazing car. Audi is reaching the top of its game. With crisp, modern lines, unique and stylized in form, the TT has been a success as a sporty car. Most people can easily recognize the TT and have a general admiration for it as a design exercise, yet some may be ambivalent about it as an actual performance car. Now, toward the end of this run of the current TT body style, Audi has chosen, like Volkswagen with its R32, to build a high performance version of the car with some unique performance features to bring buyers into the showrooms. And they have a winner in the DSG6. This car is the complete package. The 3.2 liter V6 producing 250 horsepower and 236 ft lbs of torque is simply great. It has a midrange pull that makes it fun in the real world, and revs enough to reward the driver who is pushing toward the edge. And if you want to impress your friends, tell them you have a paddle shifter like Michael Schumacher's Ferrari, and they'll want a ride...to see it in action.

A tour of the TT Coupe reveals a truly unique body shape, which is something that is very hard to find these days. When you first climb in the car, if you're more than 6 feet tall, you'll find the brow of the windshield to be curved like a private airplane cockpit. If you're over 6'4", you'll find it hard to see traffic lights due to the low cutaway of the front screen. Another sensory impact is the small side windows, reflecting the high beltline and low arch protecting the door frame. If you're tall at all, you will have to adjust your entry process to prevent knocking your head on a regular basis. But once in, the cabin is downright cozy. I call it a bit claustrophobic, the ladies that rode in and drove the car called it a secure feeling. Like the S4 we reviewed a month ago, the materials, fit and finish are of the highest quality anywhere. Neatly stitched, very comfy leather seats and attractive, understated appointments complete the simple but attractive interior look. One feature that is huge for serious drivers – Audi provides not only a tilt but a telescope adjustment for its ergonomic steering wheel. This is greatly appreciated by those who want to have a little more NASCAR feel of the wheel. One thing missing on the Audi brand that is a significant feature to those who've had it – is the radio

controls on the wheel. Audi has no controls on the wheel to date which means they must think they're a bad idea. The back seats are similar in size to those of a Carrera Porsche – use them only with small people for short rides home from the little league game. They are much better when folded down, providing a quite useful rear area that is accessed by a large hatch. And even with this large hole cut in the back side of the TT, this car is very firm – with no propensity for rattles and squeaks. Yes, this is a given on a new car. But the feel of the TT gives confidence for how well it's designed and welded together. Obviously the structural shape of the car assists with this taught feel.



The DSG Coupe front suspension starts with a gas-charged MacPherson strut system that is located by 3 point lower control arms. The rear suspension is longitudinal double wishbone, with an anti-roll bar and gas-filled shocks. Curb weight is almost 400 lbs heavier than the non-DSG version at 3428 lbs. Audi's performance stats put the 0-60 time at 5.7 seconds with a limited top speed in the U.S. of 130 MPH. Too bad, as the large spoiler on the rear deck was placed there out of need...in Europe. With concerns about lift above 140 MPH. Isn't there an autobahn in Montana?

The DSG – “Direct Shift Gearbox” represents the true state of the art in the world of automotive engineering, and it is included in this car with a price of \$43,520. Because I'm not an engineer, and this is an amazing technology, I'll quote the Audi corporate lexicon in order to explain it:

“DSG is a 6-speed manual gearbox with high variability in the selection of the transmission ratio. Employing an integrated twin multi-plate clutch, two gears can be engaged at the same time. During dynamic operation of the car, one gear is engaged. When the next gearshift point is approached, the appropriate gear is pre-selected but its

clutch kept disengaged. The gearshift process opens the clutch of the activated gear and closes the other clutch at the same time. The gear change takes place under load, with the result that a permanent flow of power is maintained.” What does this mean? The TT DSG shifts faster than we can by ourselves. We’ve been replaced. There would be no reason whatsoever to buy a TT with a shifter and a clutch. In fact, as the DSG is included in the price of this upgraded TT, it would be ridiculous. What’s more, this car comes standard, as do all TT’s, with the quattro permanent all-wheel drive with EDL (electronic differential lock) to prevent any wheel spin or other unruly behavior. Together this package is stunning – a strong if not drag racing engine, super-fast, automated transmission, and all-wheel drive to keep us out of trouble. See where I’m going here? This is a great car that was not a whole lot of fun. Audi is moving forward with so many improvements, they are replacing us and our formerly treasured driving skills.



After driving the TT in city traffic and trying the DSG paddles at the same time, I quickly came to the conclusion that during this daily driving the TT should be left in “D.” While six automatically selected gears actually is a bit of a distraction (it was ALWAYS shifting), the DSG is meticulous in its operation. But let me tell you about my hard drive in the TT. While being unable to take the TT to a track, the experience was limited to what a journalist/enthusiast/driver could learn on public roads without being stupid. We have our test routes, but we didn’t get to the limits of this car by any means. When I broke free of the traffic and street lights of the city, I discovered this to be the time to put the DSG in “sport” mode and have at the paddles. While this drive didn’t last long (because this is a very fast car), I had an epiphany during the drive. First, the standing start yielded a Formula One feel as I simply stood on the gas and let the car decide how best to apply the horsepower and to which wheel. Very nice – probably better than I could have done by myself. Then, on a challenging back road, hunkered down in the

very comfy sport seat, focusing on apexes and turn in points, I realized what this all-wheel drive, DSG, hot rod had accomplished. All I had to do was point and shoot. There was a moment when I realized why the Formula One cars and drivers have scaled new heights. Their focus is so committed to just pointing the car and accelerating/decelerating. This is where Major Tom enters the equation. Poor Major Tom was strapped in his capsule being managed by Control back on planet Earth. He understandably felt a lack of ability to affect his fate – OK, it's a stretch, but it's a colorful illustration, don't you think? Driving the TT, was a bit the same - without any of the footwork challenges, hand/eye coordination during shifts, concern about oversteer allayed, all I had to do was accelerate, brake, turn, flick the paddle – and the shifts came so simply and quickly that they felt like a switch was being flipped, which is exactly what was happening. And any time I got the car near any limit, the ESP or EDL would interrupt my driving and take over. Even with the electronic stability (ESP) program disengaged, the awesome quattro system would keep me out of trouble. This was a completely different driving experience. Fast? Absolutely. Probably faster than I could have managed without all the assists. Fun? Not as much – just an intense experience that felt more like a video game than a romp through the esses.

This may be a harsh reaction to such a wonderful car – and the DSG Coupe is just that – a wonderful car. But I'm afraid that my epiphany leading me to quote Major Tom reflects a concern about where we are headed in this new “Golden Era” of the performance automobile. Car manufacturers everywhere have now figured out how to put cars in consumer's hands that are, for all intents and purposes, too fast. But with computer systems and all-wheel drive leading the way, the ability to actually access the power and performance is limited by these systems. So it's important, when looking at statistics, to determine which of these high horsepower cars are built to be actually driven hard. It's clear that many are being built to protect you from yourself. Remember the movie “The Right Stuff” when the future astronauts fought to have pilots in the space capsules instead of monkeys or some other professions? I hope that enthusiasts will react positively to the cars that allow us to drive the cars as they are built. The Audi TT DSG6 Coupe is an outstanding car. Its performance is stellar. It's a design triumph. But I hope the next generation has more options for a trained enthusiast to drive and enjoy the car's capabilities, without being monitored too closely by “Control.”