

2014 Audi R8

Subtle changes produce a stellar result.

Overview

The Audi R8 is the sporty spearhead of the Audi lineup. Its beauty and handling prowess have been well documented, and subtle tweaks make the 2014 Audi R8 even better.

Audi named the R8 after its Le Mans-winning sports car, bringing the first road car R8 to the market in 2007. Originally only available with a 4.2-liter V8, in December 2008 Audi unveiled the 5.2-liter V10 model that was based on the Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 engine.

The V8 delivers 430 horsepower, the V10 525 hp. For 2014, a new model arrives on the block boasting 550 hp: the 2014 R8 V10 Plus.

Both the V8 and V10 are available as a Coupe or Spyder, with the V10 Plus only offered as a Coupe. The R8 V10 Plus is faster, lighter, with carbon ceramic brakes coming as standard.

All R8 models are brilliant machines to drive. They are track-munching animals, yet at the same time able to handle adverse weather conditions up snowy alpine passes in the Austrian Alps (believe me, I tried it). The mid-engine supercar contains enough frontal storage for a carry-on bag, backpack and a jacket, making it comparably efficient for cars of this nature.

The R8 cabin is as luxurious as you would expect from a high-end Audi, and yet it does not feel pretentious. The navigation leaves a bit to be desired, however. Overall, the 2014 R8 is a solid step forward from an already decorated machine.

The biggest updates for the 2014 Audi R8 come in the form of the 7-speed S-Tronic dual clutch transmission, which replaces the R-Tronic single clutch gearbox. The biggest fault with the 2012 R8 was the R-Tronic's snappy and abrupt shifting. The S-Tronic cures all the deficiencies of old. And with the addition of launch control, the R8 is a contender to dust off any Porsche 911, Mercedes-Benz SL AMG, Nissan GT-R and frankly any other sports/supercar you can dream up.

Model Lineup

The 2014 Audi R8 is offered as either a coupe or convertible, with V8 or V10 power. All R8s are mid-engine with the Quattro permanent all-wheel-drive system.

The Audi R8 4.2 quattro Coupe comes with a 430-hp V8 and the standard 6-speed manual gearbox. Leather seats, climate control, tilt-telescoping flat-bottom multifunction steering wheel, AM/FM/CD/MP3/Sirius XM stereo, Bluetooth, USB, cruise control, trip computer, bi-Xenon headlamps and 18-inch alloy wheels are standard.

The R8 4.2 quattro Spyder is equipped much like the Coupe, with the addition of a hydraulic soft top (offered in black, brown or red) and takes 19-seconds to open at speeds of up to 30 mph.

Options include the S-Tronic dual clutch transmission, 10-way power seats, Audi magnetic ride shocks, Nappa leather, carbon ceramic brakes, extended leather package, convenience package with rearview camera, auto-dimming heated folding outside mirrors, navigation, alternate wheel styles/finishes, metallic paint, 465-watt 12-speaker Bang & Olufson sound system, Alcantara headliner, piano black cabin trim, carbon fiber trim, illuminated door sills and metallic paints.

The Audi R8 5.2 quattro Coupe comes with the 525-hp V10 engine, Nappa leather, LED headlights, Bang & Olufson sound system, navigation and rearview camera.

The Audi R8 quattro Spyder includes everything from both the V8 and V10 Coupe and of course the hydraulic soft top.

Options for the 5.2 V10 include the enhanced leather package, S-Tronic gearbox, cosmetic upgrades of the V8, carbon fiber, piano black, alternate colors/finishes, headliner and door sills.

The Audi R8 quattro 5.2 Plus Coupe comes with the massaged V10 engine producing 550 hp. It comes with everything from the V8 and V10, including all the options. No Spyder is offered in the Plus.

Safety features that come standard include frontal airbags, head/chest side-impact airbags, knee airbags, pop-up roll bars on Spyder, electronic stability control and all-wheel drive. Rearview camera is an optional device that improves safety.

Walkaround

Little has changed aesthetically with the R8 for 2014. And that's not a bad thing. After all, it was captivatingly beautiful from the moment it hit US shores around five years ago. Changes (especially with regards to the exterior) have remained minimal.

The R8 appears wide and low with a hunkered down stance. Sharp lines frame sculpturally arched surfaces and a wrap-around contour visually connect the front, wheel wells, the flank and the rear of the R8. With the location of the R8's mid engine, it pushes the whole cabin slightly further forward. With the Coupe, the vertical air intakes, named the sideblades, can be ordered in many colors (including carbon fiber) and, again, indicate the position of the engine. The right sideblade also includes the aluminum gas cap. Rather than the sideblades, the Spyder displays large air intakes sculptured out of the flanks.

At the front of the car, the grille is minutely adjusted with tapered top corners and is finished in a high-gloss black. In the V10 models the struts are adorned with chrome strips. The bumper has also been tweaked fractionally, but we have a hard time distinguishing where. An optional carbon fiber front splitter (standard on the new V10) is also available and the mirrors on the R8 V10 are housed in carbon fiber.

All versions of the 2014 R8 now come standard with LED headlights. The headlights also receive static-turning lights. On all Coupe models the engine sits below a clear window, allowing a view of the German craftsmanship. Moving to the rear of the car, the all-LED taillights now boast a dynamic turn signal (in much the same way as the 2013 Mustang does). The directional sequence is created by 30 LED lights activating every 150 milliseconds, making the turn signal more intuitive, and complementing the new Audi headlamps. Both the head- and taillights are really the only major visible difference compared to the 2012 R8. Regardless, the R8 looks like a supercar, which isn't something you can say about the GT-R and 911, which appear more sport than super.

The spoiler on the R8 extends automatically at 62 mph. A large diffuser is situated underneath and is available in carbon fiber (standard on the V10). The exhaust system terminates in two round, chrome plated tail pipes (black on the V10 Plus) that produce the most intense, mystical music one could ever ask for. Both Coupe and Spyder bring onlookers to their knees, but for our money, the Spyder evokes an even greater level of emotion.

The R8 Spyder comes with the aforementioned 19-second fabric-folding roof, available in black, brown or red. The Spyder does not receive the glass engine-viewing window, replaced by engine cooling vents that run down behind the headrest. It comes adorned with an electrically lifted rear window (with defrost). This can be opened even when the top is up, allowing drivers situated in colder climates to hear the mesmerizing exhaust note without losing the tip of t

Interior Features

The cabin in the Audi R8 is remarkably un-supercar-like. That isn't to say it is bad. Far from it, in fact. It maintains an unpretentious demeanor, not out of place in a sports sedan. Creature comforts are slightly fewer, of course, but in general it is familiar, comfortable and a pleasing place to be for long expeditions.

Seats are well bolstered and, on the power-adjusted options, support can be adjusted electronically to meet every individual's requirements. They are available framed in leather with Alcantara centers, or upholstered in full leather. Spydereven have treated leather to keep them cool in hot, sunny conditions. Headroom is good and a 6-foot plus driver would have little comfort issues in the R8.

Manual tilt/telescoping steering column helps find the correct driving position, and visibility is vast out of the front windscreen, but the C-pillar does cause a large blind spot, meaning additional caution must be taken at intersections. View out of the rear is reasonable on the Coupe but tougher on the Spyder. The optional rearview camera is a huge help when reversing, making its value well worth digging deep into darkest depths of your wallet.

Aluminum style cabin trim is standard and upgrades include carbon fiber and piano black. The most distinguishing feature is the monoposto: a large arc that encircles the driver's area of the cockpit. It starts in the door and ends in the center tunnel. All the instruments are well situated and easily visible.

Dials on the center console are in short demand and with that, operating the optional navigation can be clumsy and difficult at first. Thankfully, a proper handbrake is offered, not the electric handbrake button many manufacturers are now adopting.

The manual gearbox has a cool vintage-looking slotted metal gate, and the S-Tronic displays enlarged aluminum paddles on the wheel. Both gearboxes provide a beautifully crafted brushed aluminum gearlever. The S-Tronic can also entertain gear changes from the stick but the forward/backwards is, in our opinion, the wrong way around. Forward is to upshift, backwards is for downshifting. Other manufacturers occasionally adopt this too, but traditionally the other way makes more sense for the enthusiast. It's how racecars have always been produced, so why would sports cars not follow suit?

The navigation screen is clear and legible, but the actual nav function is less than agreeable. Left to its own devices, it doesn't zoom in enough to get a feel for tricky junctions, making missing a turn all too easy. The whole appearance of the navigation seems old fashioned.

Interior storage space in the R8 is minimal. You have a couple of shallow cup holders that won't hold a bottle of water without it tipping, and storage compartments are extremely small.

Driving Impressions

The Audi R8 is fast. And for 2014, the Audi R8 (in every model) is 0.3 seconds faster from 0 to 60 mph than the outgoing machine, due to the addition of the dual clutch S-Tronic gearbox. The V10 Plus manages that sprint in just 3.5 seconds with a top speed of 197 mph. And while that is without question fast, it is not as quick as a Nissan GT-R and Porsche 911 Turbo S, which eat up the same run in less than 3 seconds.

Speed isn't everything, however (not that the R8 feels in any way lacking). We have established the Audi is aesthetically magnificent with an equally delicious interior. It is an all-round car that can (with the right tires) be driven virtually all year long. Plus, the sound of the V10 in particular makes up for its slightly slower dash to 60. The noise resembles that of a minutely quieter, softer Formula One car. Even after days of driving, it never gets old to hear the crisp downshifts and acceleration up through the revs to the 8000-plus redline. While it may not sound quite as good as a Ferrari 458 Italia, it blows the doors off the Porsche 911 and Nissan GT-R.

Curb weight for the Audi R8 starts at 3,439 pounds for the V8 Coupe in a manual. The Spyder adds a couple of hundred pounds to that. The R8 V10 comes in at 3,571 lbs. with the V10 Plus a whopping 110 pounds lighter due to the carbon ceramic brakes (26-pound saving) and other carbon fiber options such as the diffuser, splitter and the lighter alloy wheels. Audi utilizes an aluminum space frame for the body making the R8's frame weight just 463 lbs. for the Coupe and 476 lbs. for the Spyder.

The new S-Tronic gearbox brings the car inline with many of the top supercars. Shifts are blazingly fast and far smoother than with the outgoing R-Tronic single-clutch transmission. The S-Tronic, with its dual plate clutch, is compact and low, measuring just 8.46 inches in diameter. This is the single most prolific change for 2014. If there was one thing lacking in the previous R8, it was the old gearbox. Audi has well and truly solved this issue.

Audi's Quattro all-wheel drive system sends 80 percent of power to the rear wheels with an option of up to 30 percent going to the front wheels if need be. This allows the car to feel and drive like a rear-wheel-drive car, and not suffer the negative of the all-wheel-drive system on track. All-wheel drive can produce a lot of understeer (where the front wheels have less grip than the rear) and while the R8 does suffer a touch from this, we found that by releasing the gas pedal mid-corner, the car will rotate effortlessly like a pendulum, balancing the front of the car.

The benefit of the all-wheel-drive system is by utilizing all four wheels the driver can put the power down more aggressively, with more grip, and exit the corner faster. The R8 handles effortlessly well on the racetrack, inspiring confidence and responding to a smooth driving style. The traction control makes it almost impossible to spin the car, even for those who drive like an idiot, and the car behaves in an almost PlayStation-like fashion.

The Spyder handles almost as well. We expected the Spyder would feel more floppy and less stable with its heavier soft top and lack of torsional rigidity from the loss of the roof. But instead, we found the R8 Spyder felt smooth and under control with no cowl shake whatsoever. Genuinely, it was very hard to tell the difference in handling on the road between the Coupe and the Spyder.

The optional (standard on the V10 Plus) carbon ceramic brakes feel like driving directly into a ten-foot thick concrete wall. Even the newly designed steel waved-disc brakes, slamming on the brakes feels like hitting a five-foot thick slab of concrete. The only downside is perhaps their grabbiness when driving gently. Still, that is only a minor grievance.

Moving to the ride, the R8 excels. Few supercars can attest to being comfortable on a long haul, over various terrains and conditions. The R8 can. Part of it is due to the comfortable cabin, the other due to Audi's magnetic ride suspension. It comes standard on the V10 but (to save weight) is not available on the track-ready V10 Plus. The system allows the driver to switch between Comfort, Normal and Sport mode.

What magnetic ride effectively does is adjust suspension settings based on specific road conditions. It will match itself to the road. It is the key to the preposterously heavy Chevrolet Camaro ZL1's handling prowess, and Audi uses this system with similar success.

Having said all of that, the V10 Plus does not ride badly without the system, but no doubt, for every day use, I'd rather the customization provided by the magnetic ride.

Summary

The 2014 Audi R8 is the total package. It boasts an incredible balance of speed and handling, something akin to playing Gran Turismo 5. It brags a comfort/usability factor that remains exponentially difficult to uncover in the supercar world, and will be priced far cheaper than the Ferrari 458 and the like. It appears more grown up than a Nissan GT-R, and prettier than a Porsche 911. An Audi R8 is a machine that will cause people to stop, stare and drool. And no matter how long you own the car for, without question, you will act in the exact same way, each and every time you open the garage door.

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