

2009 AUDI A6 AVANT



The Audi A6 Avant, as Audi calls its station wagons, has received an update for model-year 2009. Cosmetic changes have been made to the front and rear. The suspension tuning has been improved, and torque distribution between the front and rear wheels has been modified (40/60 instead of 50/50). Finally, and most importantly, the only available engine is a 3.0-litre V6 with compressor supercharging.

Interior and cargo area

As the vehicle is a bit low, front as well as rear access is relatively easy. The front seats are very comfortable thanks to such features as height and lumbar adjustment. With tilt and telescoping steering, drivers easily find a very good driving position. Legroom is good, while headroom with the sunroof is tight for tall individuals.

In the back, the bench seat is comfortable for just two people because the transmission tunnel takes up the foot room in the middle. Headroom and legroom are adequate. The seatback splits 60/40 and folds to form a floor that angles up slightly towards the front. Folding the seatback leaves a gap behind the front seats. There's a vertical cargo net that can be installed to keep things from rolling into the gap, but the net anchors placed in the seatback sections could injure a pet.

Cargo capacity is good, but the rather pronounced forward angle of the C-pillars prevents use of full height for about 40 cm. The cargo area measures 110 cm behind the rear bench with the backrest up, 190 cm behind the front seats with the rear seatback folded, 71 cm high and 102 cm wide. The tailgate does not rise high enough to clear the head of a tall person.

Convenience and safety features

As you'd expect with Audi, the quality of cabin finish and materials is impeccable. Road noise could be better dampened. Total cabin storage is insufficient, mainly because the CD changer and owner's manual take up nearly all the room in the glove compartment. It's been a while since we saw a CD changer in a glove compartment.

Instruments and controls are well displayed. The MMI system, which is supposed to make life easier for the driver, is annoyingly complex, requiring several steps to access the audio or air conditioning functions. Climate control is efficient. Everything is illuminated at night. The horn only works if the ignition switch is in the On position or if the engine is running. The backup sensor system should turn down the radio volume when it signals.

Photo: Audi

The windshield washer nozzles under the edge of the hood can easily be blocked by snow. The wipers make a final extra swipe after the washers are used that usually smears the windshield. And it's the driver who should decide when to turn on the headlight washers, not the car. In this price range, a rear wiper should have both intermittent and continuous cycles; this Audi's is continuous only, which is unacceptable. Since the roof rails are flush to the roof, it is impossible to tie down objects without crossbars. Still, even with crossbars, it's too bad you cannot use the roof rails to attach objects more securely.

Safety-wise, the A6 comes with six airbags (dual front, side and air curtain), five head restraints, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, and stability control. Though visibility is good, the rear head restraints combined with the C-pillars create blind zones on a three-quarter-rear angle. The inside rear view mirror can create a blind spot on an angle to the right, for some drivers.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's awarded the A6 a Good rating, its highest, for driver protection in a frontal offset impact and for all-occupant protection in a side crash. For rear-impact protection, it received an "Acceptable" rating, the second highest, for vehicles built before December 2006 and a "Good" rating for vehicles built after November 2006.

Engine and transmission

The new 3.0-litre direct-injection supercharged V6 engine outputs 300 horsepower and 310 pound-feet of torque, and delivers very energetic performance. Acceleration and pickup are smooth, very lively and instantaneous. The engine is very well matched to the vehicle. It climbs readily through the gears and easily maintains its speed. Throttle response is not progressive at times. This engine is smooth and powerful but not overly thirsty, with an average fuel consumption of 11.4 L/100 km during our test.

The six-speed automatic transmission shifts very smoothly in normal mode but not quite as smoothly in sport mode, especially when downshifting. Gear changes are quick in manual mode. As always, the Quattro full-time AWD system is very efficient. In normal driving, the system sends 40 percent of torque to the front wheels and 60 percent to the rear. As conditions dictate, it can direct up to 65 percent of torque to the front wheels or 85 percent to the rear wheels.

On the road

Hats off to the engineers for the reworked suspension that provides a very smooth ride, on nearly all surfaces, even with the Sport package and 18-inch, profile 40 tires. Naturally, on some rough spots the low-profile, high-speed tires react with well-felt firmness, but otherwise, this vehicle smoothes out the road with imperturbable elegance. It displays the same competence in terms of its road holding and could give lessons in humility to some so-called sports cars. It does so without calling on different electronic settings, which reduces complexity and maintenance costs while proving that a well-tuned suspension doesn't need a barrage of electronics. In short, if you like to drive you'll be looking for excuses to rack up the kilometres... with a smile.

The variable-assist power steering is generally well tuned but can be a bit heavy in a sharp curve negotiated at around 40 to 60 km/h. It is stable, precise and quick, and delivers a bit of road feel. The disc brakes are very powerful and resist well to fade.

Inspection

Our inspection at a CAA-Quebec technical inspection centre showed that the A6 is very well built. Corrosion protection is excellent. However, the windshield washer tank is poorly located, on the left side of the engine compartment opposite the wheel. Imagine how close you'd be to traffic if you had to fill the tank on the side of the road. Debris can get through several openings under the front bumper and damage the air-conditioner condenser and power-steering cooler. The overhead camshafts are chain driven.

Conclusion

This year's improvements make the A6 Avant more interesting and more fun than ever. It delivers a comfortable, sporty drive along with all the practicality of a station wagon. In fact, some qualify it as a discretely efficient high performer (a sleeper). It can also become very expensive if you go overboard with the options list.

PROS: lively engine, seating comfort, road compartment, smooth transmission, quality of construction, well-tuned steering

CONS: insufficient storage, perfectible soundproofing, $\frac{3}{4}$ rear visibility, flush roof rails, seating for just 4, throttle sometimes not progressive.

2009 AUDI A6 AVANT

Engine: 24-valve, 3.0-litre V6 with supercharger

Horsepower: 310 hp at 4,850 rpm

Torque: 310 lb-ft at 2,500 rpm

Transmission: 6-speed automatic

Suspension: fully independent

Brakes: disc/disc

Wheelbase: 284.3 cm

Length: 492.7 cm

Width: 203 cm (with mirrors)

Height: 146.3 cm

Weight: 1,915 kg

Tires: 245/45R17; 245/40R18

Maximum towing capacity: 1,590

Airbags: dual front, plus two side and two curtain airbags

Fuel consumption

Natural Resources Canada rating:

City: 13.5 L/100 km (21 mpg)

Highway: 8.4 L/100 km (34 mpg)

Test result: 11.4 L/100 km (25 mpg)

Test temperature: 5°C to 22°C

CO₂ emissions: 5,378 kg/20,000 km

Fuel tank capacity: 80 litres

Fuel requirement: premium grade gasoline

Acceleration:

0–100 km/h: 4.9 seconds

60–100 km/h: 3.6 seconds

Competition: BMW 5 Series, Mercedes E-Class, Volvo XC70 T6

Warranty:

- Full basic coverage: 4 years/80,000 km
- Powertrain: 4 years/80,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 4 years/80,000 km
- Perforation damage: 12 years/unlimited km
- Emissions control system: 4 years/80,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter, electronic control module, onboard diagnostic system).

Factory replacement parts:

- Rear bumper: \$1,181
- Front brake disc: \$117
- Brake pads: \$137
- Muffler: \$503 (each)
- Front fender: \$453

Price according to trim level: \$66,700

Main options:

- Navigation system: \$2,500
- Sport Package: \$1,600 \$
- Technology Package: \$2,200
- Bose Surround Sound System: \$5,500

Price as tested: \$79,650

Freight and preparation: \$1,850

Dealers: Quebec: 7 Canada: 36

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