

# Long-Term Test

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## 2006 Audi A3 2.0 T DSG

Ordinary excellence



THERE ARE CARS THAT ARE FUN TO DRIVE, and then there are cars that are fun to drive and actually fun to live with on a daily basis. It's not often you discover perfect examples of the latter unless you're living a fantasy where the roads are devoid of undulations and rush-hour traffic jams are nonexistent. But since we live in the real world with real inconveniences, we are often compelled to make compromises—but compromise doesn't have to be a bad thing. Our long-term Audi A3 is quite possibly among the best choices for an all-purpose everyday car, full of practical compromise yet virtually oozing fun and excitement from its tailpipe.

Since its introduction in early 2005 and its delivery to us in November of that year, the questions regarding the stoutness of the 2.0-liter turbocharged inline-4 or the integrity of the su-



per-slick twin-clutch DSG transmission (now called S tronic) have been answered. Yes, we love it! No, we haven't broken it. Never in our 50,000-mile test drive did we encounter so much as a single mechanical hiccup from the engine or transmission, and after perusing the World Wide Web we haven't come across anyone who has experienced otherwise.

Although it's still too early to have explored the life span of the transmission's wet clutches, when we consulted Audi on this subject we were surprised to learn that they are expected to last the life of the

vehicle, regardless of shifting frequency or aggression. Big Brother, or in this case a unique control module/valve body combo called Mechatronics, is responsible for regulating as well as protecting the transmission at all times. That being said, it is strongly recommended that you adhere to the fluid and filter service intervals.

Our overall upkeep costs were minimal thanks to the Audi Advantage Maintenance Program, which provided inspection along with filters and oil free of charge (normal-wear items such as brake pads/rotors are not included) for four years or 50,000 miles. However, this program for all newly purchased 2007 models now requires an initial fee of \$590. At 50,000 miles we have yet to replace a wiper blade or brake lining, and by the looks of it, could probably squeeze another

>> Simple elegance and understated aggression are two things Audi has mastered in its current vehicle line. Our A3 is a stunner from all angles.

PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMAY & BRIAN BLADES



20,000 miles out of what's left—everlasting brake pads, anyone?

A couple of things that have required replacement, though, include a blown 20-amp fuse temporarily causing a cigarette lighter malfunction (good thing we don't smoke), an ECM update that alleviated an early software start-up bug, and a failed rear-wheel bearing, which we believe was caused from the wheel being thrown off its alignment (this also affected our second set of tires, which required early replacement due to irregular wear). Everything was fixed under warranty keeping our running tab at Newport Beach Audi to an affordable \$0.

Because our car came equipped with the sport package, which included among other things a sport suspension and summer tires, our 225/45ZR-17 Dunlop SP Sport Maxx rubber (\$167 apiece mounted and balanced) cost us a bit more to replace than the standard Pirelli P6 Four Seasons (\$152 each), but they didn't burn holes in our pockets either. We feel it was absolutely worth the extra cost not only because

>> The interior of our A3 is well laid out from its gauge cluster-mounted LCD display, to the intuitive Audi Multimedia Interface. The only noticeable wear area was on the driver-side window controls, which started to show signs of frequent use. Below, our A3 involuntarily inspects the rear differential of a Nissan Frontier that backed into (and over) the Audi.

the tires added a world of change to our spirited driving experience, but also 23,000 miles is an awful long way to forsake summer performance tires when you're probably only offsetting a couple days of lunch money and a week's worth of Venti Orange Mocha Frappuccinos.

As for the interior of our A3, the leather-wrapped sport seats have held up well. The steering-wheel-mounted controls required absolutely no effort to operate and the nav system LCD between the gauges doubled as our competent codriver, providing us clear turn-by-turn instructions to our pre-determined destinations. (We applaud Audi for allowing passenger operation of the guidance system while moving.)

We could have benefited from a touch more lumbar support in the front seats and slightly less confusing cruise-control manipulation during our longer drives, but all in all road trips were among the A3's fortes. The switchgear retains all functions and pleasant tactility, save for a couple of driver's side window buttons, which have begun to flake on the front edges.

Last, though more of a personal preference as well as a secret wish of some (including me), was for the distinctive Audi-leather "new car smell" to fade. It remains as aromatic as the day it rolled off the factory line.

Knowing that the A3 was not going to



stay with us forever, a few on our staff are actually suffering from a bit of separation anxiety; one staffer has already bought one, and a couple more are contemplating excuses to follow suit. The runt of Audi's litter has definitely impressed us over 50,000 blissful miles.

### AT A GLANCE 2006 Audi A3 2.0 T DSG

	Poor	Average	Excellent
Touring			✓
Engine			✓
Handling		✓	
Reliability			✓
Fuel efficiency*		✓	
Ownership cost			✓

  

Delivered Price	\$32,590
Resale value at end of test <small>(wholesale price from Kelley Blue Book)</small>	\$23,625
Deduction for mileage <small>(Kelley Blue Book)</small>	\$4,725
<b>Total resale value</b>	<b>\$18,900</b>
<b>Total miles covered in test</b>	<b>50,000</b>
<b>Miles since last report</b>	<b>3,085</b>
<b>Average miles per gal.</b>	<b>25.2</b>

### COSTS, OVERALL & PER MILE

Depreciation, 535 days	\$8965
Mileage deduction	\$4725
Gasoline 1984 gal. @ \$6069	
Oil 8 qt. @ \$48	
Routine maintenance	\$667
<b>Overall cost for 50,000 miles</b>	<b>\$19,026</b>
Cost per mile	38¢
Average cost per mile long-term test (since March 1997)	46¢

### REPAIRS & REPLACEMENTS

**Normal/routine:** Four Dunlop SP Sport Maxx tires, mounted and balanced (\$667). All routine maintenance covered under Audi Advantage Maintenance Program.

**Repairs:** 12-volt/cigarette lighter fuse blew, ECM refresh to solve start-up issues, failed passenger-side rear-wheel bearing due to faulty alignment, all replaced under warranty. New set of four Dunlop SP Sport Maxx tires including alignment (\$718) due to irregular wear.

**Unforeseen events:** Broken rear hatch cover (valued at \$272) covered under warranty. Pickup truck backed into car; hood, front fascia and both headlamps repaired and replaced (\$3664).

\*Road & Track's Fuel Economy Rating:  
**Poor:** Less than 17 mpg  
**Average:** 17 to 27 mpg  
**Excellent:** more than 27 mpg