

## Audi R8 V10 – Performance Car of the Year

### THE PERFECT TEN



**This year, our favourite performance car is again German, but it wears a different badge on the bonnet. Step forward Audi's R8 V10. This car sees its makers taking on the cream of the world's supercar elite. And every one of them must take this car very seriously indeed. Jonathan Crouch reports**

Not long ago, the thought of paying six figures for an Audi, any Audi, would have seemed absurd. It's a mark of the excellence of the R8 V10 that at the wheel, it feels perfectly logical. Did I say logical? When that kind of money would buy you a Porsche 911 Turbo? Or, if you're more Sloane Square than Silverstone, an Aston Martin DB9, a Maserati GTS or a Mercedes SL63 AMG?

Well, look at the facts. This R8 has a better power-to-weight ratio than the Porsche and another 25bhp. It looks more arresting. And, if you want exotic, it has a Lamborghini engine under the bonnet. As for any of the other rivals I mentioned, well they wouldn't see which way this car went on a track or a twisty road. This is Audi shaking the establishment. For our Performance Car of the Year test, we took one to the Ascari Race Resort in Southern Spain to find out how they'd done it.

#### **Driving Experience:**

From the very first few laps we covered at the Ascari track, it was clear that all the ingredients were in place for a world-beating supercar. Relatively light weight, an agile chassis and a glorious engine. But where Porsche has had forty years on the market to put these together in world-beating perfection, Audi had had less than four by the time that this ten cylinder R8 was launched in 2009. No matter. This car is still brilliant. What it isn't is the kind of completely different proposition that a 911 Turbo is when you compare it to a standard 911. This is simply a faster and more complete R8.

But there certainly nothing wrong with that. You'll be wanting the statistics: rest in sixty in 3.9s on the way to 196mph. That's only 0.7s quicker than the already very rapid 420bhp 4.2-litre V8 version but on the move, the almost endless reserves of torque make the difference feel much greater. Yes, the thunderous 518bhp 5.2-litre Lamborghini V10 may have 35bhp less than it does in a Gallardo Superleggera, but if you owned this car, I can't imagine you'd ever miss it. For the few who would, Audi did a limited run V10-powered R8 GT which matched the Lambo's output precisely.

The handling's a stage removed too, thanks to springs that are 20% stiffer at the front and 22% stiffer at the rear, plus a thicker rear anti-roll bar. It also helps that this variant gets Audi's clever magneto-rheological damping fitted as standard, offering standard and sport settings. Throw it into a corner and it works with you, with perfect driver feedback, no nasty habits and a lovely hard-edged wail as you thrust towards the 8,000rpm red line, the horizon rushing towards you as if on fast forward.

As with all R8s, this one's so brilliantly driver-orientated courtesy of Audi's decision to give its quattro four-wheel drive system a rear wheel drive-bias: never more than 35% of the torque goes to the front. What it doesn't have is the kind of twin-clutch auto gearbox you'll find in a rival Porsche: instead, there's a somewhat clunky Lamborghini-derived R-tronic paddle-shift auto option that isn't the slickest of its kind. Fortunately, the manual 'box that most customers choose is lovely, slotting slickly about its chromed Ferrari-style gate.

#### **Design & Build**

Visually, the R8 is a distinctive cocktail of low-slung curves and delightful design extravagance – Ferrari, but with a German twist. But it won't appeal if you like the understated elegance of a Porsche 911 or the Max Power aggression of a Nissan GTR. Unlike these two rivals though, it looks like a £100,000 supercar should. There are many details to soak in. The side blades which channel air to the



engine can, for example, be specified in many different colours and finishes. Even the lighting is suitably exclusive; this was the first production car to feature wholly LED lamps front and rear.

And the changes over the V8 model? Well, there aren't many. Assuming that you haven't spotted the enormous V10 engine under the rear transparent cover and you've missed the badgework on the wings, visual tweaks are limited to the intricate 10-spoke 19-inch wheels, wider sills, enlarged air intakes and different exhausts. Like all R8s, this one's impressively light (only 60kgs more than the V8 variant), thanks to the fact that 92% of its body and chassis is fashioned from aluminium. Go for the Spyder soft-top version though, and there's another 100kgs to carry around, the inevitable result of fitting it with a beautifully-engineered hood that's coupe-like when raised and stows in just 19s at speeds of up to 30mph.

Inside, the interior remains an object lesson in how to package a two seat car with plenty of space, decent visibility and fantastic Audi build quality. A pity though that the sat nav information screen is one of Audi's older offerings, rather than the MMI touch system that the brand offers on far cheaper but more recently designed models. And bootspace? Well, your expectations won't be high and they shouldn't be. There's 102 litres of room in the front boot for a couple of squashy bags and there's also a slot behind the seats but otherwise, you'll be needing to travel pretty light.

### **Market & Model Range**

The list pricing makes it pretty clear which car Audi sees as its closest competitor, the £103,000 asking price pretty much identical to Porsche's 911 Turbo. You'll need a premium of £9,000 if you want the pretty Spyder convertible version and an extra £5,000 if you want the R-tronic semi-automatic transmission instead of the standard 6-speed manual. As for other rivals, of course, you could save £45,000 and buy a Nissan GTR but it isn't quite the classy statement many will want to make. A similarly-priced Mercedes SL 63 AMG isn't in the same driver's league and neither, frankly, is the Aston Martin DB9 that's only a little more. As for Italian exotica, well you could spend around £50,000 more on a Lamborghini Gallardo Superleggera with basically the same engine and go no faster. Or around £65,000 more on a Ferrari 458 Italia that isn't much quicker either and only has two driven wheels.

At first glance, the price premium of well over £20,000 that this R8 V10 demands over the V8 version seems hard to stomach for a car that's less than a second faster to sixty. But that's before you read the fine print. In actual fact, once you've added the Nappa leather trim, sat nav, fancy side panels, LED lights and magnetic ride that most R8 buyers want, there's less than £10,000 in it, which seems a fair premium for a fairly awesome car.

### **Cost of Ownership**

No supercar is going to be cheap to run: this one certainly isn't. In theory, you could get over 25mpg if you're cruising gently, but throw some hard driving spells into your journey and that figure will plummet well past the official 20.9mpg combined consumption figure to make 15mpg a realistic journey average. The official CO2 return is 191g/km. Insurance is a top of the shop Group 20.

Depreciation is a tougher one to get a handle on and much will depend on how quickly these cars are built at the German Neckarsulm factory. Figures of 350-400 cars a year for the UK suggest that the R8 will never become over-familiar in the way Porsche 911s are on our roads. That should help prop up residuals.

### **Summary**

Most R8 customers now buy a V10 – and you can see why. That 518bhp feels about right for this perfectly balanced chassis gives you some idea as to just how good it was in the first place.

Unlike its Italian rivals, it feels bullet-proof. Unlike its Porsche arch-enemy, it makes a six-figure statement. And unlike any sporting car Audi has yet produced, it's good enough to score a perfect ten and become our Performance Car of the Year.