

AUDI-ENCE APPROVAL

Audi's new flagship TT takes aim at Porsche's 718 Cayman.

BY PHILL TROMANS

IT'S BEEN 17 years since Audi introduced the TT. Since then, it's matured from a bubbly, cartoonish machine, oft maligned as a hairdresser's ride, into a sophisticated sports car.

Now, with the latest TT RS, Audi has created something that rivals supercars for pace. Almost 400 horsepower and acceleration to take on the real automotive big guns are attributes to be taken very seriously. Audi execs claim that there's not really anything like the TT RS, thanks to its front-engined layout and all-wheel drive, but it's the kind of machine that will attract potential customers for Porsche's mid-engined, rear-wheel drive 718 Cayman.

Available in both coupé and folding soft-top roadster form, the RS boasts bolder styling than the rest of the TT range but, as befits the Audi image, remains on the subtle side of aggressive. The interior – one of Audi's strongest suits – is beautifully styled and finished.

Power comes from a 2.5-litre, turbocharged, five-cylinder engine that develops 395bhp, attached to a seven-speed, dual-clutch transmission. With Audi's famed Quattro all-wheel drive system, it means incredible acceleration from standstill. The sprint to 100kph is over in a lung-clenching 3.7sec, almost a second faster than a 718 Cayman S. Put your foot down when exiting a corner and you'll flinch as the horizon rushes at your face.

Flick the car's settings into Dynamic mode and the sports exhaust opens up to a shrill, metallic rasp on acceleration – wonderful on the open road, if slightly embarrassing and drone-like through town. Luckily a button on the centre console shuts it up while retaining the car's sportier settings on steering, throttle and gearbox.

On the car's launch event on roads around Madrid, Spain, and at the Jarama racetrack, the TT RS shows accessible pace and genuine engagement – it's possible to drive quickly straight out of the box, without feeling like you're about to be spat into the scenery. It doesn't have the pinpoint sharpness of the Cayman when cornering, but it makes up for it with scintillating acceleration and user-friendly performance. Porsche customers would do well to take a look. ■

BIG POWER

The Audi TT RS has almost 400 brake horsepower and will sprint to 100kph in just 3.7 seconds.

LAUNCH CONTROL

For the full eyeball-squeezing acceleration experience, use the launch control feature. Left foot on the brake, right foot on the gas, then step off the brake and hold on for dear life.

EVOLUTION

The Audi TT was first introduced in 1998 and is now on its third generation. It's available as either a coupé or soft-roof roadster.