

Audi TT: First Impressions

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As of this post, my Audi TT has been in my possession for about 48 hours. I've gotten to know it a bit, learned what it can do, and I love it even more than I expected I would. The drive home from the dealership was downright blissful, and while my new-car bliss with my Land Rover Freelander came with [a number of caveats](#), there is nothing about this car that causes me significant concern.

(Image: http://cdn.fur.vc/awi/gallery/mountain-audi-9_icon.jpg)

(Image: http://cdn.fur.vc/awi/gallery/mountain-audi-2_icon.jpg)

(Image: http://cdn.fur.vc/awi/gallery/mountain-audi-7_icon.jpg)

First thing's first, this is a sports car, so its performance is a big part of its appeal. I haven't had anything sporty since 2006, when I had my Acura Integra, so I didn't have a big frame of reference going into this. But as soon as I started driving it, I remembered the fun of a sports car. I remembered the adrenaline, the thrills, and the outright joy from driving a performance machine. The TT did not disappoint in the slightest. In fact, it's by far the fastest and best-handling car I've ever driven, and I'm seriously interested in using it to improve my performance driving skills. I'm pretty ok at handling a car, but most of my driving skill is based on off-road and severe-conditions driving (where I'm proud to say my abilities are top-notch, getting snowed in doesn't happen to me when I have access to a four-wheel-drive).

The transmission is disorienting, but I'm getting used to it, and as I adjust to it, I love it. It's VW/Audi's DSG, a computer-controlled dual-clutch manual transmission. So, its user interface is that of an automatic (shift lever with Park, Neutral, Reverse, Drive, and +/- manual shifting, and no clutch pedal), but its function is that of a manual operated better than most pros, yielding surprising fuel economy, fast, smooth shifting, and performance that doesn't feel dampened by a torque converter. The disorienting part is that, despite being used like an automatic, it feels very much like a manual, especially at slow speeds. It'll pull itself along at idle, but it feels a bit unsteady doing it, particularly in reverse, and it can have a hard time starting uphill, I have to be quick on the throttle to make sure it doesn't gain any roll-back momentum. The manual even recommends using the emergency brake to hold the car in place when starting on a steep incline, like a manual transmission car, and it's something I'll need to practice before I visit a more hilly area, like Harrisonburg or Pittsburgh.

One thing that's taken me by surprise, in a very good way, is how the technology in this car can make such a night-and-day difference between sport and normal driving. It's equipped with a magnetic adjustable suspension, with a switch to toggle between Sport and Standard modes. Initially, I assumed this simply meant that the button changed how stiff the shocks were, but Audi went beyond that. The car is equipped with an entire suspension subsystem, which controls how stiff the shock absorbers are based on what the car is doing. During hard turns, the outside shocks stiffen. During hard braking, the front shocks stiffen. And when sport mode is enabled, the shocks do get stiffer in general, but from what I can tell, these responsive-dampening scenarios also increase to the point that a hard turn feels more effortless than even a car built strictly for track driving. Additionally, the transmission has a Sport mode, which changes the shift timings and clutch performance from "luxury sedan" to "track car", and functions more like what I expected from the TT. With these two settings combined, the difference between sport and normal is like having two completely different cars, a luxury coupe and a supercar.

Beyond performance, though, this car is incredibly luxurious. Which, in some ways, is more important to me; I could've gotten any number of high-performance cars for this price, including some that are considerably faster,

and a few that handle better. But I bought an Audi TT for its combination of luxury and performance, and I was not disappointed. When not in sport mode, it drives and rides like a comfortable, quiet sedan, albeit one that hugs the road like it's on rails. The seats are incredibly comfortable, I could easily spend hours in them, and the heated seats are such a treat in this cold weather. The leather is soft, supple, and an absolutely joy to sit on, it's like being hugged every time I drive. And, the climate controls are significantly better than anything I've ever imagined a car could have.

After the first five miles of my trip home from the dealership, I quickly decided to pull off for a long dinner and manual-reading session. For years, I've always told everyone to read the owner's manual of their car(s), cover-to-cover, and following that advice has taught me many things about every vehicle I've owned. In the case of this car, reading the manual was an absolute requirement, because there's just so much to this car. In a general sense, it's a luxury car with a great deal of technology and features, but I had an additional disadvantage, since every vehicle in my family is ten years old or more, and my Freelander's feature set was rudimentary by comparison. I was quite satisfied with the Freelander at first, having come from a bare-bones sedan and two mid-90s luxury cars, but the difference between the Freelander and this Audi is staggering. So, reading the manual led to many surprises, and also greatly increased both my love of this car and my loyalty to VW/Audi in the future, in two very big ways.

First, to put it simply, I could not imagine a more perfect car if I designed it myself. Everything that's ever annoyed me about every car I've ever driven has been changed in this car to fit exactly how I'd want it to operate. Things that are normally automatic, that I'd like control over, have controls for the driver to switch them on or off, and things I do manually that I'd like to automate have been automated. A few examples:

- The windshield wipers automatically slow down when the car is stopped, something I normally do myself, and the rain sensor has adjustable sensitivity.
- When slowing downhill, the transmission automatically downshifts to use engine braking. My Freelander did this, but from what I can tell, the TT is much better at it.
- Daytime running lights are present, but there's a switch for them, so I can keep them off permanently. Ditto for the "coming home" lights, something that's nice to have occasionally, but completely pointless in well-lit parking lots or my apartment building's parking garage. Ditto for automatic headlights as well, something else I dislike.
- The windshield wipers hide under the edge of the hood, but instead of having to play games with turning off the ignition while the wipers are turned on to get them in the right position to replace the blades, there's simply a computer setting that pops them upwards.
- There's a power-retractable spoiler, so I can have it when I need it, but keep it tucked away when it's not needed.
- The heated mirrors can be easily switched off when not needed.

Second, this car is like the Linux of cars, *everything* is user-configurable. The in-dash menu system can control countless settings that I expected I'd need a computer interface device to adjust. I never expected any car on the market to have this level of customization available through in-car interfaces.

Generally, a car's stereo system doesn't get my attention, because I've always replaced mine in every car I've owned, and most of the ones my family has owned. I knew that the stereo in this car had an abnormal number of features, but replacing it wasn't completely out of the question. I was exceptionally impressed. Not only does it do everything I want a car stereo to do (satellite radio, Bluetooth, MP3 playback that isn't device-centric), it does everything my top-of-the-line aftermarket stereo could do, and much more. Aside from the aforementioned key features, it has auxiliary input, a 6-disk CD changer, **two** SD card slots for MP3s (versus 1 in the stereo I put in the Freelander), and an incredible level of control in the steering wheel buttons. It also has navigation, but it's pretty rudimentary, especially in its text entry, so I'm not sure how much I'll actually use it.

After all this praise, there are some negatives to mention, but they're greatly outweighed by the positives. The biggest is the backseat; there pretty much isn't one. I went into this purchase expecting the car to be a 2-seater 99% of the time, because it's rare for me to have more than one passenger. But, while the TT is known to have a backseat that pretty much only exists for insurance classification purposes, I figured it would be about like my old Integra; uncomfortable for average-sized adults, unusable for large adults, but functional for short periods if needed. In the Integra, with the front seats all the way back, the back seat had 4-6" of leg room. In the TT, with the front seats all the way back, the back seat has zero leg room. Literally, the backs of the front seats sit flush against the back seat. Curious about the uselessness of the back seat, I tested it out myself. If I put the front passenger seat far enough forward to still be able to sit in it, it was physically impossible for me to even get into the back seat. If I slid the front passenger seat all the way forward, I could get in the back, but the seat couldn't be slid back at all. So, I'll be considering this car strictly a 2-seater, with rare exceptions. Annoying, but far from a dealbreaker.

The only other negatives are pretty frivolous, and unlike my Freelander, there's no high-stakes sword of Damocles hanging over it. I wish it had a sunroof, for one thing, I really enjoy having as much glass as possible in my vehicle. But it's bigger than my Integra was, so it doesn't feel claustrophobic without one, and with the cabin layout and window design, there's plenty of sunlight coming in (unlike my Crown Victoria). I also find the interior lighting pretty lacking; it's lit by strategically-placed directional LEDs, which are beautiful to look at, but pretty insufficient for actually lighting anything, unless it's dark enough for high beam headlights, a situation difficult to find where I live. I may install a real dome light in the future, as long as I get one from another Audi of a similar year. And, there are two features my Land Rover had that I wish were present in this car; heated windshield, and rear windshield wiper. I get why there's no rear wiper, it'd be impossible to add one in a way that doesn't break the elegant curves of the car, but I do really miss it. I'm genuinely surprised there's no heated windshield, though. I'm keenly aware that heated windshields are abnormally prone to cracking, and horrifically expensive to replace, but after having a vehicle that had one for two years, standard defrost can't even compare. And the heated windshield washer fluid reservoir is helpful, but useless until the car warms up.

One other thing that bears mentioning is that, in some ways, this car doesn't quite feel like it's mine. Part of it is that it's such a massive upgrade over my previous vehicles, or anything my family has ever owned, that it feels more like a rental than something that's mine. But more than that, part of my usual car-purchasing process involves a ritual of replacing the stereo, installing other electronics like my HAM radio, and making a list of what I want to do to it. This is the first time I've ever had a car where I literally had no changes in mind, aside from the aforementioned dome light. There's nothing I'm substantially unhappy with, nothing I'm in a hurry to upgrade, and especially nothing that's within my abilities to change. I won't be adding my HAM radio, mostly because there's nowhere to put an antenna that isn't hideous. There are a few things that would be nice, like an integrated USB charging system, and I'm considering getting it painted a different color in a few years, but really, it's exactly what I want, right out of the box.

It also hasn't presented much of a personality or gender, in my mind. It's entirely pointless imagining on my part, but I tend to strongly personify my cars, and it's easy to do with older used cars. They tend to have enough quirks to feel like they have an entire personality. This one feels much more like a machine, which is strange, but it doesn't make me love it any less.

Ultimately, this car is not only exactly what I wanted to replace the Freelander with, it's exactly what I've always wanted. And, it nudges me back toward my preferred two-car model; I like having a sporty car, and a truck or serious SUV, because I'd rather have two cars that are excellent at their respective tasks, than one car that tries to compromise. This car serves the sporty car slot more perfectly than I could've ever imagined, to the point that I almost don't even need to fill the SUV slot. Eventually, I imagine I'll start pining for a truck again, but I will absolutely not be parting with this Audi until something catastrophic happens. Which I hope won't happen for a very, very long time.

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