



Travel light to enjoy the good-looking Audi A1, suggests Tim Barnes-Clay

The Audi A1 looks set to continue its dominance of the awards circuit as it celebrates its fifth title of the year – Best Small Car at the 2011 Fleet World Honours, held recently. The A1's Best Small Car Fleet World award joins the prestigious Car of the Year and Supermini of the Year awards from *What Car?* magazine, Best Small Hatchback from Parkers New Car Awards and Best Luxury Small Car from the CarBuyer Awards.

Audi's success with the A1 could be down to its sheer good looks, but I suspect it's more to do with the brand's reputation for attention to detail and quality. It might not be the cheapest supermini, but Audis are always strong performers on the used market – and that will balance the books.

Prices for the A1 start from £13,420 and go to £20,710 for the top-of-the-range 1.4 TFSI 182bhp model. My test model was the 1.4 TFSI 120bhp Sport S tronic, with an on-the-road price of £17,120. However, a list of options fitted to the press demo, including heated door mirrors, electric climate control, and multi-function steering wheel with gear shift-paddles, inflated the cost to over £18k.

It's obvious that Audi is chasing a modern customer group with the new car. The German firm admits it is targeting a young, urban, lifestyle-oriented public. It makes

sense; there was gap in the market for Audi and it has plugged it. It is the first premium car in the subcompact segment – a true, fully fledged Audi – with sporting good looks.

The interior of the A1 is surprisingly roomy with a clean, clear control layout. Modern materials and colours emphasise the youthful character of the A1 and Audi even offers colour-customisation – from the air vents to the LED interior lights and seats. There is even a variety of paint finishes from which to choose for the roof arch.

The only drawback is the boot. It is small, and it backs up what Audi says about its target market. No family, or even a single parent, is going to get their young child's pushchair and paraphernalia in there. Even if you're without kids, a big shop will probably overwhelm the boot's capacity.

Behind the wheel, the agile chassis and the powerful 1.4 TFSI engine make for a very satisfying drive. The steering is ultra-direct and, thanks to excellent weight distribution and good electronic stabilisation gadgetry, the handling is precise and safe.

The new A1 also sets new efficiency standards. For instance, the 120bhp TFSI engine follows the downsizing principle – it substitutes turbocharging for displacement and draws its fuel through direct injection units. With a 0-62mph sprint of 8.9 seconds, a top speed of 126mph and fuel consumption averaging 54.3mpg, you realise the technology isn't just hype.

The A1 is available with the seven-speed S tronic dual-clutch transmission, which

shifts very quickly, comfortably and with no detectable interruption to the flow of power. Operated automatically or manually, the S tronic 'box adds another layer of pleasure to what is an already fun car to drive. It also has another plus point – it further reduces fuel consumption. Apart from a bigger boot, and maybe a lower price-tag, could you ask for more? **V**



PROS 'N' CONS

Looks ✓
Satisfying drive ✓
Efficient ✓
Boot space X

FAST FACTS

(1.4 TFSI 120bhp S tronic model)

Max speed: 126 mph
0-62 mph: 8.9 seconds
Combined mpg: 54.3
Engine: 1390 cc, 4 cylinder, turbo petrol
Max power (bhp): 120 at 5000 rpm
Max torque (lb/ft): 147 at 1500-4000 rpm
CO₂: 119 g/km
Price: £17,120 on the road