

QUICK FACTS
PRICE £134,500
ON SALE NOVEMBER



Audi R8 V10 Plus

10.7.15, Portugal Second-generation mid-engined supercar sets out to prove that its excellent predecessor was no fluke



Audi's best-practice approach to producing functional yet stylishly seductive interiors is in full effect in the R8. Dials are an all-digital display



The new R8 is 15% lighter but 40% more rigid than the outgoing model; mid-mounted V10 produces a raucous 601bhp and 413lb ft in 'Plus' guise



It's 2007 and we've just been assaulted by the excellence of the RS4, but still, the R8 is a revelation. A revelation because it proves that Audi can make a world-class sports car. We didn't doubt it knew how to; we just didn't think Audi's people thought it was important enough to do. Thank heavens that they did.

The first R8 arrived with four-wheel drive, an aluminium structure and a naturally aspirated 4.2-litre V8 engine that revved to the heavens. It won our Britain's Best Driver's Car contest – easily. A larger V10 was added later, and that was superb, too.

This second-gen car, then, has to live up to a hefty amount, and that might explain why Audi hasn't opted to change the underlying formula.

There's still an aluminium monocoque, only now with carbonfibre-reinforced plastic in key places in order to increase rigidity by 40% and reduce weight by 15% over the old model. The V10 is back, too, although not the V8. Shame. We always thought the V8 was the marginally sweeter-handling car. The

V10 remains in its 5.2-litre form but with more power than before. In its standard guise it produces 532bhp, or as the V10 Plus, as tested here, it makes 601bhp. With a 205mph top speed and a 0-62mph time of 3.2sec, it's the fastest production Audi yet. Cor.

The V10 still sends its power to all four wheels and exclusively through a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic gearbox; there is no manual option. The quattro four-wheel drive system no longer has a viscous coupling to divert power around, but instead uses a multi-plate clutch that can divert 100% of power to either end.

The observant among you will be aware that the R8's mechanical elements sound remarkably similar to those of the Lamborghini Huracán – and that's because they are. We've been left a touch cold by the blisteringly fast but numb-handling Huracán thus far. It'll be interesting to see if the R8 can do better.

The short answer is that it can. Really, this is a terrific car. For one, it's as easy to live with as it ever was. Visibility is good for a mid-engined

car, and the interior is lovely in the way that Audi interiors usually are. Ergonomically it's sound, too. The all-digital instrument binnacle is crisp and clear, allowing the rest of the dash to be clean. There are two seats only, with a small shelf behind that I suspect can take golf clubs if you have to. The engine is in the middle, so there's a small boot at the front. And the R8 rides well enough to push most



The revised four-wheel drive system can send up to 100% of power to either axle

Keep the nose planted on turn-in and the R8 will pivot around its middle, like the old one did

road lumps out of the way, probably as well as a Porsche 911 Turbo does and, I suspect, better than a Mercedes-AMG GT or Aston Vantage can manage.

Right, that's the sensible bit out of the way. The V10 engine is a mega piece of kit. On start-up, it's rather antisocial. In fact, it is most of the time, but that's the rub if you want a car that makes its peak torque at 6500rpm and peak power at 8250rpm while on its way to an 8500rpm redline. And, you know, I rather like a car that has one of those, especially when its engine is naturally aspirated and has superb throttle response and a hard, hollow noise – increasingly so if you put the drive modes (of which, inevitably, there are several) into their grumpiest settings and turn up the exhaust's volume. The seven-speed dual-clutch 'box is as slick as we've come to expect them to be, and if you listen carefully there's a lovely pneumatic-sounding 'psst' on downshifts, a bit like a racing car.

The R8 handles, too. Our route involved some roads in southern Portugal – mostly well surfaced –

and the superb Portimao race circuit. I fear the ESP off button was disabled on the cars we used on track, leaving that safety net in place, but in the most liberated drive mode the R8 still allows a little slip at either end. It's enough to tell you that, like the Huracán, there's a touch of stabilising understeer early in a corner, but also that the R8 has a degree of throttle adjustability and agility that the Huracán can only wish for. Keep the nose planted on turn-in by trailing the brakes into a corner and the Audi is inclined to pivot around its middle, just like the old one did, and drive its way out on the throttle. The brakes – carbon-ceramic discs as standard on the Plus – are superb, too.

What's not so good? Not a lot. Our test car had dynamic steering – the system that gives you quicker steering at lower speeds than at higher speeds. These systems are getting better – the R8 is stable on a motorway and yet feels agile at manoeuvring speeds – but they still don't supply a natural feel. A 911's rack is better. And, if you were being really picky, you might

mourn the passing of that original V8 R8, with its lighter engine giving even greater agility and handling purity. But the R8 has been all about the V10 for a while now. In that guise, the car previously occupied a quiet little niche of its own, above most 911s and below most exotic supercars, even though it had the pace of the faster cars. It still does, actually. In fact, it doesn't let up.

These days I'd put the Mercedes-AMG GT into the area in which the R8 finds itself, while McLaren will soon enough drop the 540C and 570S in there as well. Given that company, the R8 had to be good – and it is. It feels more visceral and alive than the 911 Turbo, and although it is less raucous and caricatured than a Mercedes-AMG GT, its handling is the more accomplished.

The new R8 does all the things the old R8 did superbly well and tweaks the competence up by about 10-20% in every key area. It turns out that Audi still knows how to make a world-class sports car and still thinks that it's an important thing to do.

MATT PRIOR



AUDI R8 V10 PLUS

Audi's R8 returns with all of the original's magic intact – and blistering speed



Price	£134,500
Engine	V10, 5204cc, petrol
Power	601bhp at 8250rpm
Torque	413lb ft at 6500rpm
Gearbox	7-spd dual-clutch automatic
Kerb weight	1630kg
0-62mph	3.2sec
Top speed	205mph
Economy	23.0mpg (combined)
CO ₂ /tax band	287g/km, 37%