

Won Over By Precision

Audi Q3 Pairs Adventurous Design With Sharp Responses

By Derek Price
CARGAZING.COM

I didn't expect a gear selector to help justify a \$50,390 window sticker.

But after a week with the all-new 2026 Audi Q3, the little things I touched every day played a surprisingly big role in changing my opinion of it.

At first, I struggled to see the appeal. The engine and transmission reminded me too much of a Volkswagen, which is probably the most offensive thing I could say within earshot of an Audi purist.

I wanted more polish for the money. The powertrain didn't have the silky operation I expected from a German luxury vehicle costing this much.

That complaint never disappeared entirely, but it became less important as the miles accumulated.

The Q3 is quick. Power comes from a turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder rated at 255 horsepower and 273 pound-feet of torque, with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic and standard all-wheel drive.

Audi estimates a 5.5-second time to 60 mph.

More than the speed, though, I came to appreciate the precision. The engine responds immediately, and the transmission snaps through its shifts with a decisiveness that suits the rest of the vehicle.



An oversized grille, distinctive lighting and sculpted bodywork give the redesigned 2026 Audi Q3 an eye-catching appearance in a class where conservative crossover shapes often dominate.

There's a similar feeling in the controls surrounding the steering wheel.

The gear selector looks like a little card moving up and down in a slot beside the wheel. I'd never used anything quite like it, yet it felt intuitive almost immediately. Moving the shifter off the console also frees up useful storage space.

The switches have a crisp, tactile snap, with the reassuring resistance I expect from an expensive German car. Working them reminds me of a Swiss watch, tiny parts fitting together just right.

Those details matter when you're paying a premium for something you'll use

every day.

The cabin's appearance is even more persuasive. Sculpted panels and accent lighting give it a contemporary, adventurous look, while the materials and assembly have the tightness and solidity I associate with Lexus interiors.

That's high praise.

Audi also remembered that people need somewhere to sit and put their belongings. Passenger accommodations are decent, storage is useful and the rear seat slides and reclines to adjust the balance between people and cargo.

Behind that seat, there's about 25 cubic feet of lug-

gage space, expanding to nearly 50 with it folded.

The technology worked beautifully, too. The 12.8-inch touchscreen responded quickly, and Apple CarPlay behaved flawlessly in both wired and wireless modes during my test. I have no complaints there.

Outside, Audi deserves credit for giving its smallest crossover some visual ambition.

This category produces plenty of interchangeable shapes, but the Q3's huge grille and unusual headlight arrangement work together remarkably well. It's handsome and eye-catching, and the styling never struck me as obnoxious.

My tester's 20-inch wheels looked terrific, too. I just wish I didn't have to ride on them.

The thinner tire sidewalls sacrifice cushioning, and I'd choose smaller wheels for a quieter, smoother highway experience. Audi supplies 18-inch wheels as standard equipment, which is where I'd start.

The Q3 is fun to toss around corners, with responses that encourage more enthusiasm than I normally bring to a family crossover. That agility became one of my favorite things about it.

Fuel economy is rated at 22 mpg city and 29 highway, and it takes regular gasoline.

The Q3 starts at \$43,700 before destination, competing with small luxury crossovers such as the BMW X1 and Mercedes-Benz GLA.

My tester's options pushed it past \$50,000, where the powertrain refinement deserves scrutiny even with this much design and equipment.

I'd put it on my shopping list for the handling and cabin alone, provided a firm ride suited my daily driving.

By the end of the week, I understood what the extra money was buying. I'd grown attached to the precision I could feel through my fingertips, and I wished more vehicles paid this much design attention to the little things.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT WAS TESTED?

2026 Audi Q3 S-line quattro (\$43,700). Options: Premium paint (\$595), 20-inch wheels (\$1,800), driver assistance (\$1,250), infotainment (\$1,000), black optic package (\$750). Price as tested (including \$1,295 destination charge): \$50,390

BY THE NUMBERS

Wheelbase: 105.6 in.
Length: 178.4 in.
Width: 73.2 in.
Height: 64.1 in.
Engine: 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder (255 hp, 273 lb.-ft.)
Transmission: Seven-speed dual-clutch automatic
MPG: 22 city, 29 highway

RATINGS

Style: 9
Performance: 8
Price: 7
Handling: 9
Ride: 6
Comfort: 8
Quality: 9
Overall: 8

WHY BUY IT?

The new Q3 has distinctive design, satisfying controls and eager cornering, particularly if a firm, sporty ride belongs on your luxury-crossover wish list.



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Inside, the Q3 surrounds its occupants with sculpted panels, ambient lighting and carefully finished controls, including an unusual steering-column gear selector.

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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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