

# An orderly

# Q

Clive White sizes up Audi's new baby SUV and finds it to be neat and well behaved – but will there be a queue of buyers?



I presume that, as far as Audi's SUVs are concerned, the Q suffix is a nod to the company's long-running quattro four-wheel drive system (despite its insistence on the lower case initial for the 'q' word). Anyway, at least it's different from the possibly more obvious 'X' designations of some competitors.

Q3 is the latest and, fittingly, third member of Audi's 'Q' family so far. Allegedly a fourth is in preparation, Q2, which will sit well enough alongside its A2 compact-hatch sibling, but messes up the hitherto tidily-odd numbering system of Qs 3, 5 and 7.

Having been brought up against the background of the many marques of British Leyland, where 'badge engineering' became an art form, I can't help but smile at VW Group's vast array of models and variants derived from so thrifty a number of platforms. Q3 is based on the Golf's, which supplies the underpinnings for numerous vehicles of all types from all the VW Group's marques, including the Tiguan and Škoda Yeti, and probably a future Seat SUV.

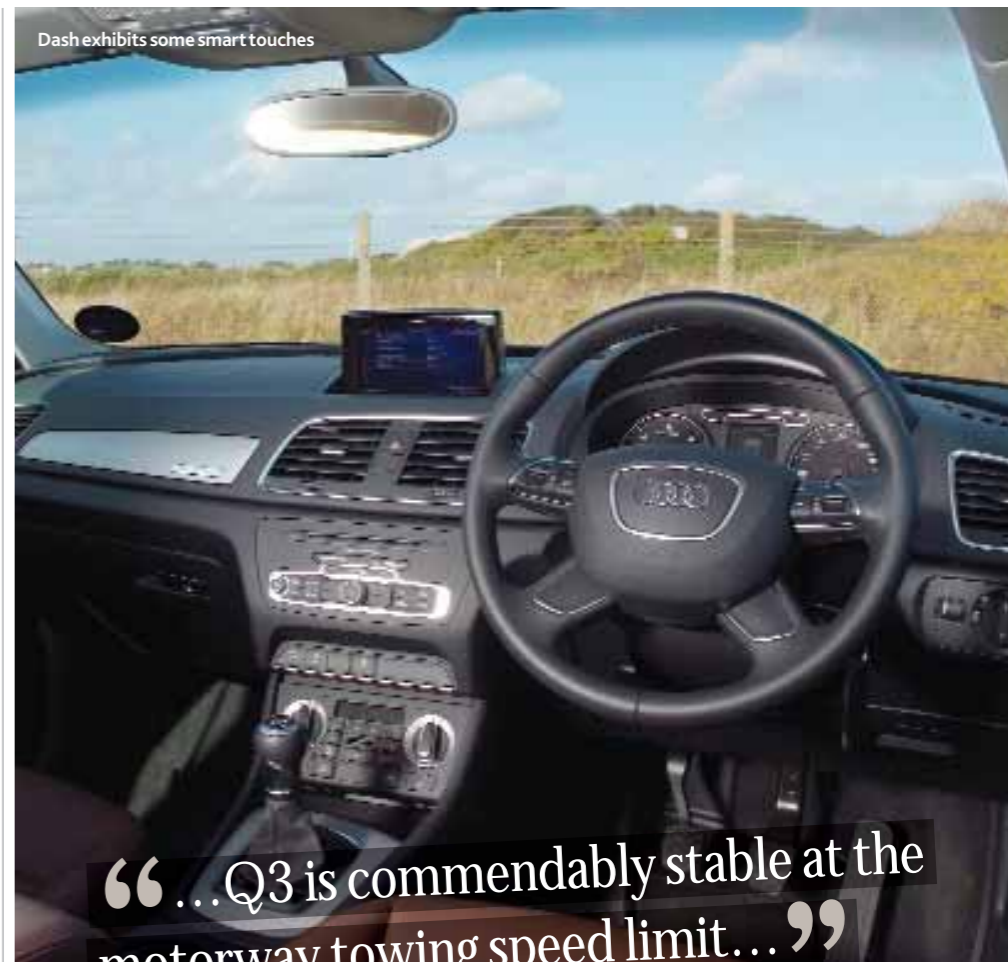
But, where BL got it wrong was that it rather cynically applied its collected marque names as little more than trim-level designations. Austin/Morris were the basic variants, with Wolseley, Riley and Vanden Plas getting progressively more luxurious (the 'Deluxe', 'Super' and 'Executive' versions) and MG providing the sporty (GT) touches – but all very plainly the same model with far too much overlap in terms of customer appeal.

VW Group, on the other hand, preserves its marque portfolio as outwardly separate entities with their own individual identities. It obviously works rather better than BL's take on badgery: you only have to look at VW Group's recent output and sales figures. What lies beneath, however, will tell a rather more incestuous story.

## CABIN COMFORT

I mention the above because my first impression of the Q3's interior appeared to lean rather more in VW's direction than Audi's. Maybe my preconceptions got the better of me and I expected more than I found, but the now legendary Audi interior ambience seemed to not quite hit the spot when we first met.

Having said that, don't let my initial feelings put you off. Firstly, most car manufacturers would be proud to have VW's reputation for perceived interior quality. Secondly, Q3 changed my mind as time progressed and I began to appreciate its subtleties.



For instance, those stylised metallic trims and bezels around door handles, vents and switch panels are mirrored in miniature on the wheel and instrument panel, which is a smart touch. But the fact that their finish is just short of shiny somehow lends a touch of class, and I get a sense that had they been highly-polished chrome, it could have cheapened the effect.

The cabin is neither voluminous nor cramped, though we're talking about the Golf platform, remember, which does have a bit of form when it comes to rear legroom. True enough, slide the front seats rearward and space does diminish for those in the back, but the upright seating position saves the day to leave them with adequate space.

Seating is nicely upholstered in fine-grain leather, but the test car's shade of tan may not be to everyone's taste. The padding was generally comfortable, well shaped and supportive, though I did find the cushion caused a bit of a pressure point after long stints (but that's probably just me).

The fascia slopes down from the windscreen in two stages, never actually presenting a flat surface. Large air vents flank the instrument binnacle, within which a pair of clearly marked analogue

**With thanks to** Chichester Caravans, Redhill for the loan of Towcar Test caravans. Call 01737 768266 or see [chichester-caravans.co.uk](http://chichester-caravans.co.uk)

gauges share space with the digital info centre of equal clarity.

I was a little surprised to find the 'infotainment' screen as a pop-up unit atop the dash, though this does have the double advantages of placing it near the driver's natural sight line and it can be quickly folded down if the display distracts or isn't wanted. Text and graphics on the screen are beautifully sharp and clear, lending a further subtle air of quality. >>

Compact Q3 is less than 141/2ft long







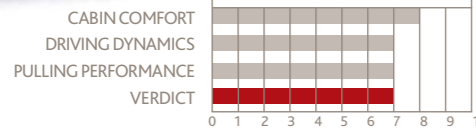
Q3 is a willing towcar

Better than expected luggage space



## TECHNICAL

### RATINGS



RRP	£26,510 OTR
Engine	1,968cc, in-line 4-cyl, common-rail turbodiesel. Transverse
Power	138bhp (103kW) @ 4,200rpm
Torque	236lb ft (320Nm) @ 1,750-2,500rpm
CO <sub>2</sub>	149g/km
Transmission	Six-speed manual, AWD
Fuel/tank/econ	Diesel/14gal (64 litre)/44.9mpg solo/27.9mpg towing 1,300kg
Kerbweight	1,535kg (85% = 1,305kg)
Gross vehicle weight	2,136kg
Gross train weight	3,955kg
Noseweight limit	80kg
Towing equipment	Retractable towbar kit (incorporating 13-pin socket) £625 inc VAT
Spare wheel	Inflation kit
Insurance	Group 18E
Audi Q3 model-range	£25,065 (2.0TDI) to £31,870 (2.0TFSI quattro S tronic)
Caravan Club insurance quote	£286.20*

\*55-year-old person living in the TA22 postcode area (Dulverton, Somerset). Driver, whose occupation is bank staff, has full unexpired no-claim discount and has held a full, clean licence for 25 years. Car garaged overnight and is not modified. Use is social, domestic and pleasure not exceeding 6,000 miles per year. Price as of December 2012 and includes Insurance Premium Tax where applicable.

Club insurance: 0800 028 4809 • Info:audi.com

Most other controls – climate, audio, etc – are tiered down the centre, contained in panels formed by their neat bright-metal bezels. The lower switchgear, however, does seem to be placed rather low down behind the gear selector, and unless it's familiar enough to be operated by feel, can be a momentary distraction from the road.

Nevertheless, Q3 will be a comfortable and pleasant place for most occupants to travel – possibly with the exception of a compressed centre passenger seated as part of a trio of full-sized adults. Depends how friendly they are – or want – to be...

### DRIVING DYNAMICS

I do like a nice organ pedal. You know, the ones that are hinged on the floor. They always seem more comfortable and supportive than pendant throttle pedals – and VW Group is very good at supplying them. It's also very good at relaying your right foot's commands, in this case to the 2.0 TDI engine.

While dishing out generous amounts of power and torque, the diesel can still get aurally gruff and a bit too noticeable when asked to work hard. Much better to change up early via the light, smooth clutch and easy-going gear shift to exploit the unit's generous torque. Q3's economy devices will thank you for that, too. Speaking of which, the on-by-default Stop-Start kill switch is easily accessible if such contraptions are an annoyance. (I wonder if these systems default to 'on' because no one would otherwise ever be bothered to activate them?)

The steering seemed a little too light with not quite enough self-centring effect for my taste, though I soon got used to it, and it was generally smooth and precise. But a little more communication with the road surface would be nice. Road surface reaction is left to the suspension, however, as the Audi could get a bit bouncy at times. Generally, though, ride compliance was pretty good for a raised-up SUV, and it proved nicely agile for a car of this type.

### PULLING PERFORMANCE

What a boon retractable towbars are! So easy and convenient to use, especially when the electric socket is incorporated into the neck of the ball. No kneeling or laying down (unless you feel the need), just prod a button in the boot, snap the bar into place, hook on and plug in. Coupling doesn't get easier than this!

But a couple of points you need to be aware of. Due to the lack of a suitable breakaway cable attachment, the cable had to be looped around the towball neck – nothing unusual about that. Towing

mirror attachment was a bit fiddly due to the door mirror fairings' curvature, but, with a spot of cajoling, the clamps were persuaded betwixt door-mirror glass and cowling to fit securely (though restricting door-mirror adjustment).

Being unkind, I'm not sure the inertia generated by an 18-second interlude from rest to 60mph would have unsettled the towing mirrors very much. But, to be fair, that stopwatch figure felt subjectively quicker – with the time of 13.5sec to 50mph perhaps being of greater relevance. The intermediate 3rd-gear interval between 30-50mph of 7.5sec is most respectable, however.

It should be mentioned that with the test car being only around 4,000 miles old, there will be better performance and economy to come from the 2.0 TDI as it frees-up with accumulated mileage. But even at this not fully broken-in stage of its career, the engine put up a pretty good show with the outfit rarely causing obstruction, Q3's generous torque and plentiful gears keeping progress brisk enough.

While the Audi's compact dimensions encourage agility, its brevity of wheelbase could permit some jiggleness to creep into the ride. Although just mildly irritating when solo (though no worse than many other SUVs), when the effect was amplified by a trailer it could become quite annoying. In most circumstances, though, Q3 rode both smoothly and comfortably.

Commendably stable at the motorway towing speed limit, the Audi felt just as competent when negotiating the twists and turns of country B-roads. Its steering, while arguably rather light, was nicely geared and accurate; yet this compact SUV still managed to possess the substance to control difficult situations like downhill, mid-bend corrections with confidence. ■

### VERDICT

Audi represents the premium end of VW Group's ranges (the Vanden Plas in BL parlance), but doubtless competes with at least its Volkswagen equivalents – if not the Seats and Škodas, too. For those willing to pay prestige prices, Q3 is into well-specified Freelander territory and the Audi's top models' list prices could easily buy you a Range Rover Evoque. Then there are those Far Eastern competitors for Q3 to contend with.

So many SUVs forming an orderly queue for your attention...