

beast of bavaria

The new Audi RS 3 Saloon may appear understated – but on the Neuburg track it's capable of truly monstrous performance

WRITER Alfred Rinaldi
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Ah, how happy I am to be back in Bavaria, the land of schnitzels, steins, autobahns – and, best of all, Audi. This is a part of Germany that prides itself on the happy marriage of tradition and high-tech that might be summed up as ‘laptop and lederhosen’.

Neuburg, Audi’s gleaming new customer experience centre – and home to Customer Racing and Audi Sport – proves the point. Set in the low-lying farmland of the Danube Valley, it’s stylish in that considered Audi way, so attentive to detail that the fire extinguishers are white instead of red (a deviation that had to be sanctioned by the authorities – we are in Germany, after all).

Today Klaus Demel, Head of Audi Driving Experience and International Motorsport Marketing, is the gatekeeper to my happiness. ‘When the quattro was launched, back in 1980, the technology was so progressive, our customers didn’t really know how to use the car to its full potential – and that was the origin of today’s Audi Driving Experience,’ he explains. ‘Neuburg is a state-of-the-art facility that’s all about customer enthusiasm. We demonstrate what Audis are capable of and teach you the skills to make the most of this. As a result, you’ll be able to really enjoy your car to the max and drive it more safely too.’

In a minute, he’s going to hand me the keys to Audi’s brand-new five-cylinder turbocharged 400PS RS 3 Saloon. Would I like a cup of coffee first? I politely decline. The lorry carrying its precious cargo has just pulled up and I’m already excited enough. A shot of caffeine might just push me over the edge.

As the car rolls down the ramp, it looks utterly understated and almost subdued. True, there are some details that give the game away: the massive air intakes in the front apron, the bright silver touches, the quattro legend at the bottom of the grille and, of course,

the iconic red Audi Sport RS 3 badge. Then the side comes into view, with its muscular sills, five-spoke alloy wheels and optional bright red brake calipers hinting that it has an elemental force that is matched by equally phenomenal stopping power. If there’s any lingering doubt as to what we’re dealing with, the two oval tailpipes foretell the drama that’s to come.

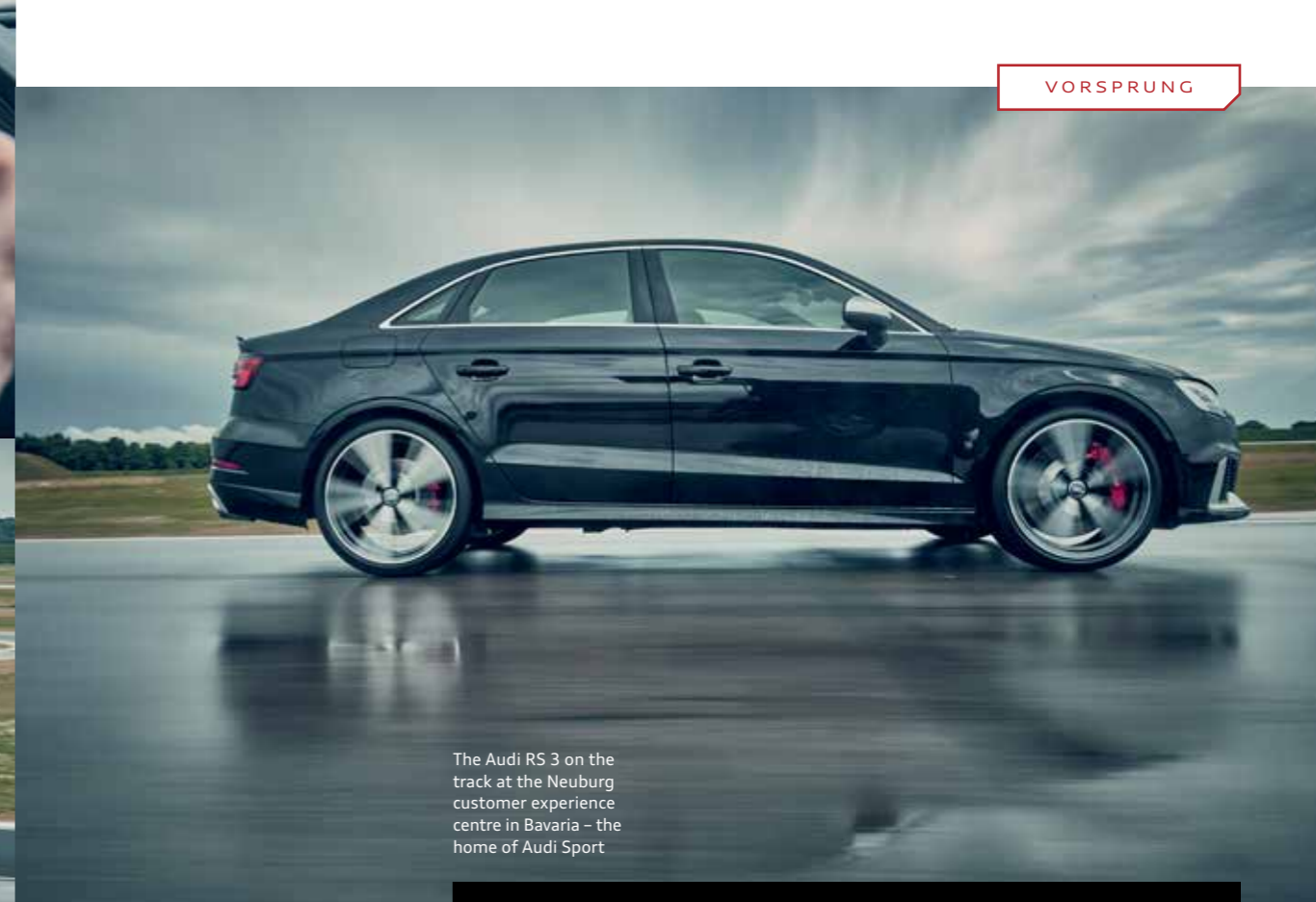
Formalities over, I settle into the Sport seat and get comfortable behind the steering wheel. Audi interiors are always pure joy and the RS 3 gets every detail just right. Every surface, every switch is a pleasure both to behold and touch, and the optional Bang & Olufsen stereo fills the cabin with impressively crisp sound.

I lower the volume and press ‘start engine’. The beast springs to life, revving up menacingly before settling into an ominous burble reminiscent of a 1980s rally quattro. It’s the growling timbre of Audi’s famed five-cylinder turbocharged powerplant – as unmistakable as that of a whisky-voiced rock star warming up his vocal cords before his next performance.

I take it easy for the first lap or two, getting to know the course and establishing a feel. This is an intuitive car to drive, with a dual-clutch seven-speed S tronic transmission doing all the work

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The Audi RS 3 on the track at the Neuburg customer experience centre in Bavaria – the home of Audi Sport

AUDI RS 3 SALOON

Price from	£45,250 OTR
Engine	2.5 TFSI 400PS
Transmission	seven-speed S tronic
Drivetrain	quattro all-wheel drive
0-62mph	4.1 seconds
Top speed	155mph/ 174mph (optional)
Efficiency	34mpg combined*, 188g/km CO ₂ *

*Standard EU test figure for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results. With 19-inch wheels

and four drive modes at your disposal. For an even more intense driving experience, the transmission can, of course, also be controlled by shift paddles mounted just behind the steering wheel.

Now I’ve warmed up my tyres, I start to push a little bit more. There’s an awesome force under my right foot that is quick to be unleashed – 480Nm of pulling power is readily available from a ridiculously low 1700rpm, and it shows.

It obeys my commands impeccably as I drive at speed into a corner, braking late but decisively, turning in, then accelerating at the apex and hurtling towards the >>




next bend. It also stays perfectly neutral and, even in the rain, the front of the car never once feels in danger of running wide, thanks to the latest quattro technology.

After a set of tight corners comes the long straight. I accelerate hard, unleashing the full power of the 2.5-litre engine and flying towards the horizon like one of the Tornado jets at the nearby NATO base. The rain starts falling even harder, but the RS 3 remains unfazed, ensuring the fun continues whatever the weather.

And the car has plenty still to offer as I hammer round and round, asking more and more of the RS 3 without ever being disappointed. Finally, it's time to go. Reluctantly, I get out of the car, take one last look, thank Mr Demel for a fantastic day and make towards the exit.

'Can I have the keys, please?'

'Of course!' I say, digging in my pocket. How could I possibly have forgotten? Must be a Freudian thing. 

To learn more about the new RS 3 Saloon, visit www.audi.co.uk and click through New Cars/RS

