

30 years of the Audi A3: three decades of ‘Vorsprung’ in the premium compact segment

Ingolstadt, October 9, 2026 — Audi is celebrating 30 years of the A3. Since its world premiere at the 1996 Salon Mondial de l’Automobile in Paris, the Audi A3 has become one of the brand’s most iconic and successful model series. As the vehicle that established the premium compact class, it has kept generations on the move for decades now. To date, more than six million units of this compact model have rolled off the assembly line.

Whether it’s a Sportback, Sedan, or allstreet; a traditional gasoline or diesel engine; a plug-in hybrid; or the sporty S3* and RS 3* models, the A3 lineup offers immense variety to meet a wide range of needs and has been widely popular for generations.

Key facts

- 30th anniversary: in 1996, the Audi A3 defined premium in the compact segment and established a new class
- Four generations full of innovations: the A3 introduced numerous technological milestones to the compact segment
- Success story: more than six million A3 models have rolled off the assembly line since production began
- From Ingolstadt to the world: over the past 30 years, the A3 has been delivered to more than 100 countries worldwide
- A wide range of choices: the current A3 generation alone offers 17 different model and drive variants for a broad target group with diverse needs

Four generations full of innovations

When Audi introduced the first A3 in 1996, the model established a new segment: the premium compact class. High-quality materials, distinctive driving dynamics, and innovative technologies made this compact Audi a success story.

First-generation Audi A3 (8L), 1996 – 2003

The Audi A3 made its debut as a three-door hatchback. The rising shoulder line, strong C-pillars, and low-slung greenhouse gave the compact car the look of a coupé. Inside, the A3 stood out with its fine craftsmanship, intuitive ergonomics, and high-quality feel. Its extensive equipment and broad range of accessories allowed customers to customize their vehicle more than ever before in the compact class.

The equipment, data, and prices specified in this document refer to the model range offered in Germany. Subject to change without notice; errors and omissions excepted.

**The collective fuel/electric power consumption and emissions values of all models named and available on the German market can be found in the list provided at the end of this text.*

In addition to the “Attraction” equipment line, there was the sporty “Ambition” version and the elegant “Ambiente” comfort variant.

Over the course of the model cycle, customers could choose from four gasoline and four diesel engines. In September 1998, Audi introduced quattro all-wheel drive to the compact segment for the first time – a milestone in the history of the A3. Designed specifically for compact vehicles with transversely mounted engines, an electronically controlled multi-plate clutch was fitted at the input to the differential in the rear-axle drive.

At the beginning of 1999, a five-door version was added to the model lineup, and the sporty S3 was introduced. The powerful three-door model hinted at its potential with a muscular appearance and an elegant interior featuring electrically adjustable Recaro sports seats and piano-lacquer trim. The 1.8-liter turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine generated 154 kW (210 PS) with two intercoolers, sending power to all four wheels via a six-speed manual transmission. Seventeen-inch wheels kept the S3 firmly planted on the road, while four ventilated disc brakes brought it to a powerful stop. In fall 2001, the engine’s output increased to 165 kW (225 PS).

Second-generation Audi A3 (8P), 2003 – 2013

In 2003, Audi introduced the second generation of the A3. With increased length, wheelbase, and width, passengers enjoyed a larger interior and a more spacious feel. The A3 was launched with four- and six-cylinder engines. The most powerful versions could be ordered with a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, enabling gear changes without any interruption in traction. A six-speed automatic transmission (tiptronic) was also available, which stood out for its compact design and low weight. An advanced McPherson strut suspension and a new four-link independent rear suspension, working together with electromechanical steering, provided enhanced driving dynamics and greater ride comfort.

The A3 Sportback arrived in September 2004 with a wheelbase that was 65 millimeters longer than that of the previous five-door model and a distinct station wagon-style rear end. The Sportback was also the first A3 to feature the Singleframe grille – already familiar from the A8 – which went on to become a defining design element of the brand. In 2008, the S3 was also introduced as a five-door Sportback, powered by a 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbocharged engine with 195 kW (265 PS). Audi also expanded the A3 family with its first convertible model: the A3 Cabriolet debuted in 2008 with a classic fabric top.

The next milestone followed in 2011: the Audi RS 3. With its 250 kW (340 PS) five-cylinder engine and all-wheel drive, it was considered a pioneer of modern hot hatches. The top model in the series showcased its dynamic driving capabilities with widened front fenders made of carbon-fiber-reinforced polymer, larger air intakes, and dual tailpipes.

Third-generation Audi A3 (8V), 2012 – 2020

The A3 (8V) was the first Audi model based on the modular transverse matrix (MQB). The new platform enabled consistent lightweight construction, digital solutions, and a wider range of variants. The use of aluminum reduced body weight, improving efficiency and the sporty driving experience. In the cockpit, the new display and operating concept integrated a retractable monitor and a rotary/push button with touchpad. Voice control, smartphone pairing, and online services made the Audi A3 highly connected. It was also equipped with numerous assistance systems from the full-size class, including adaptive cruise control, lane-change assist, and lane-keeping assist. The engines followed the downsizing philosophy. They replaced engine displacement with turbocharging, delivering strong performance with lower fuel consumption. In addition, the A3 was equipped for the first time with cylinder-on-demand technology, which deactivated two of the four cylinders under partial load.

One year after the third generation was launched, the Audi A3 became available for the first time as an elegant sedan, attracting new customers, especially outside Europe. In 2014, the A3 Sportback e-tron was introduced as the brand's first plug-in hybrid model in the compact class and an important step toward electrification.

After the RS 3 Sportback had received a power upgrade to 270 kW (367 PS), the RS 3 Sedan was launched in 2016. The first compact Audi notchback with the RS badge was powered by a 2.5 TFSI engine producing 294 kW (400 PS).

Fourth-generation Audi A3 (8Y), since 2020

The fourth A3 generation (8Y) came onto the market in 2020 with a sportier design, digital daytime running lights, and a new touch-based operating concept. Some of the A3 powertrains were equipped with a 48-volt mild hybrid system for the first time, reducing fuel consumption while also improving performance.

The new generation of the Audi RS 3* followed in 2021, featuring a five-cylinder engine delivering more torque and the torque splitter at the rear axle. The variable torque distribution between the rear wheels took driving dynamics to a new level and replaced the previous Haldex system. With acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in 3.8 seconds and a top speed of 290 km/h, the RS 3* set best-in-class records.

In 2024, Audi expanded the model family with a striking crossover: the A3 allstreet*. With its characteristic off-road look, three centimeters of extra ground clearance compared to the A3 Sportback, and a raised seat position, the vehicle offers an SUV-like driving experience combined with high functionality.

In the same year, the Audi S3* received an extensive technology upgrade as part of a product refresh, with increased power output of 245 kW (333 PS), quattro all-wheel drive with the torque splitter, a sportier front axle, and optimized steering. This delivered more agile and responsive handling.

Today, the Audi A3 features enhanced digital functions. A new display and operating concept with a panoramic display, intelligent driver assist systems, and digital services define the current generation. At the same time, the model family offers a wide range of body and drive variants to meet customers' diverse needs.

A success story from Ingolstadt

The Audi A3 has been popular around the world for three decades. Combining everyday usability, premium character, and technical innovation, the model has established itself as a fixture in the international automotive market.

From day one, the model series has been produced at the Audi headquarters in Ingolstadt. In response to high demand, local production at the Brazilian plant in São José dos Pinhais was added in 1999. In the early 2000s, production was expanded to the Győr plant operated by Audi Hungaria. The Audi A3 plays a significant role in shaping the brand's identity to this day. Since production began, more than six million A3 models have rolled off the assembly line and been delivered to over 100 countries worldwide. This makes the model series one of the most successful in the history of the brand with the four rings.

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Summary

With each new generation, the A3 has continued to evolve: from the classic three-door model to the Sportback, Cabriolet, and Sedan, all the way to the sporty S3* and RS 3* models and the A3 allstreet* crossover. Along the way, the Audi A3 has introduced numerous technological milestones to the compact segment, including quattro all-wheel drive, innovative dual-clutch transmissions, modern assistance systems, and digital cockpit solutions. At the same time, the series has remained true to its core values of sporty design, high-quality craftsmanship, and technological progress. Today, the A3 is a highly connected vehicle that combines comfort, efficiency, and enjoyable driving in a modern way, continuing the success story of the brand with the four rings.

Historic milestones

1996

The **Audi A3 (8L)** premieres at the Salon Mondial de l'Automobile in Paris.

1998

quattro all-wheel drive makes its debut in the compact class.

1999

The **Audi S3** launches with a turbocharged 1.8-liter inline four-cylinder engine and all-wheel drive.

A **five-door version of the Audi A3** expands the model family.

2003

The **second A3 generation (8P)** premieres. Despite its coupé-like appearance, the interior dimensions have grown. The multi-link rear axle improves driving dynamics and ride comfort.

2004

The **A3 Sportback** made its debut, introducing the **signature Singleframe**, which becomes the face of the brand. To this day, the Sportback is the highest-volume body variant of the A3.

2008

The **Audi A3 Cabriolet** is launched. The model series grows to include an open-top variant.

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2011

The **Audi RS 3 Sportback** comes onto the market, establishing the legendary five-cylinder engine in the compact segment.

2012

The **third A3 generation (8V)** premieres based on the modular transverse matrix. Audi introduces the MMI operating system with its rotary/push button to the compact class.

2013

The **Audi A3 Sedan** goes on sale, expanding the model series with an elegant notchback variant.

2014

Audi presents the **Audi A3 e-tron**, its first plug-in hybrid in the compact class.

2016

Audi unveils the **RS 3 Sedan** — the first compact Audi notchback with the RS badge.

2020

The **fourth A3 generation (8Y)** is introduced with a sportier design and a new touch-based operating concept.

2024

The **Audi A3 allstreet*** expands the model family with a striking crossover variant.

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About Audi

Audi combines premium mobility with technological progress and pioneering design. For more than five decades, "Vorsprung durch Technik" has embodied the technological aspirations of Audi.

Audi offers a broad portfolio of premium vehicles for different customer needs and regional requirements. The Audi Group operates in more than 100 markets, produces at 21 production sites in twelve countries, and employs more than 88,000 people worldwide. The brand's history dates back to 1909. Since 2026, Audi has also been competing in Formula 1 with its own factory team.

In addition to the Audi brand, the Audi Group includes the sports car manufacturer Lamborghini, the luxury brand Bentley, and the motorcycle manufacturer Ducati.

Find out more about the Audi Group [here](#).

Fuel/electric power consumption and emissions values of the models named above:

Audi A3 Sedan

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 6.0–4.4;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 137–115; CO₂ class: E–C

Audi A3 Sportback

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 6.2–4.4;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 140–117; CO₂ class: E–D

Audi A3 allstreet

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 6.2–5.0;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 141–121; CO₂ class: E–D

Audi S3 Sedan

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 8.2–8.0;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 186–182; CO₂ class: G

Audi S3 Sportback

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 8.5–8.3;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 194–189; CO₂ class: G

Audi A3 Sportback e-hybrid 150 kW

Fuel consumption (weighted, combined): 1.4–1.1 l/100 km;
Power consumption (weighted, combined): 13.0–12.1 kWh/100 km;
CO₂ emissions (weighted, combined): 32–25 g/km; CO₂ class (weighted, combined): B;
Fuel consumption with discharged battery (combined): 5.4–4.9 l/100 km; CO₂ class with discharged battery: D–C

Audi A3 Sportback e-hybrid 200 kW

Fuel consumption (weighted, combined): 1.4–1.2 l/100 km;
Power consumption (weighted, combined): 13.1–12.5 kWh/100 km;
CO₂ emissions (weighted, combined): 32–28 g/km; CO₂ class (weighted, combined): B;
Fuel consumption with discharged battery (combined): 5.3–5.0 l/100 km; CO₂ class with discharged battery: D–C

Audi A3 allstreet e-hybrid

Fuel consumption (weighted, combined): 1.4–1.2 l/100 km;
Power consumption (weighted, combined): 12.9–12.4 kWh/100 km;
CO₂ emissions (weighted, combined): 31–26 g/km; CO₂ class (weighted, combined): B;
Fuel consumption with discharged battery (combined): 5.3–5.0 l/100 km; CO₂ class with discharged battery: D–C

Audi RS 3 Sedan

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 9.3–8.9;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 210–201; CO₂ class: G

Audi RS 3 Sportback

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 9.4–9.0;
Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 214–205; CO₂ class: G