

quattro[®] quarterly

Summer 2011



25 Audi A3 TDI

35 New York Auto Show

45 2011 Audi TT RS vs. 1985 Audi Sport quattro

42 Frank Beddor Nationals—Sonoma, CA

82 Win a 2012 STāSIS A4 2.0!

quattro quarterly

The magazine of Audi Club North America
Volume XXI, No. 3 Summer 2011



Photo: Paul Rivera

Audi A3 TDI

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ON THE COVER

- 21**
It's All in the Technik
by Elaine Catton
Universities, congresses, trade fairs provide food for thought on future technologies.
- 25**
Audi A3 TDI
by Paul Rivera
Spacious, nimble, versatile...a benchmark for pragmatic luxury.
- 29**
Driven: 1981 Volkswagen Iltis—the Ur-Ur quattro
by George Achorn
The Iltis inspired the first Audi quattro prototypes and finished first place in the grueling Paris-Dakar race.
- 35**
New York Auto Show
by Paul Rivera
Audi is on a roll with worldwide sales continuing to climb.

- 39**
SE63 Vintage Racing 52 Butchering the Bull
by Mark McCourt—Courtesy reprint Hemmings Sports & Exotic Car
Its reputation ripped, Audi ravages racing.
- 42**
Frank Beddor Nationals at Audifest in Sonoma, CA
Join ACNA members in Sonoma wine country as the Golden Gate Chapter proudly hosts the 27th Frank Beddor National Event at Infineon Raceway.
- 45**
Ultra Compared: 2011 Audi TT RS vs. 1985 Audi Sport quattro
by George Achorn
- 51**
Spain to Portugal in a TT Coupe
by Andreas Dharmawan
Laughter bounces around the ancient stone walls of Madrid as the city comes to life at night.



Photo: George Achorn

Volkswagen Iltis



Photo: Paul Rivera

Audi A7

COLUMNS

- From the President 8
by Bill Congo
- Behind the Scenes 10
by Karen Chadwick
- Motoring con brio! 16
by Giovanni Tomasi
- Europoint 21
by Elaine Catton
- Motorsports News 59
by Mike Veglia
- Carousel's Corner 74
by Jim Benoit
- Pink Driving Gloves 75
by Alex Tomasi
- Ask John 80
by John Beckius

DEPARTMENTS

- Audi Tradition 14
- Q Forum 18
- Directory of Advertisers 19
- Member Photo Gallery 57
- Audi Bits 60
- quattro Events 65
- Chapter News 69
- Member Discounts 76
- Q Mart Ads 79

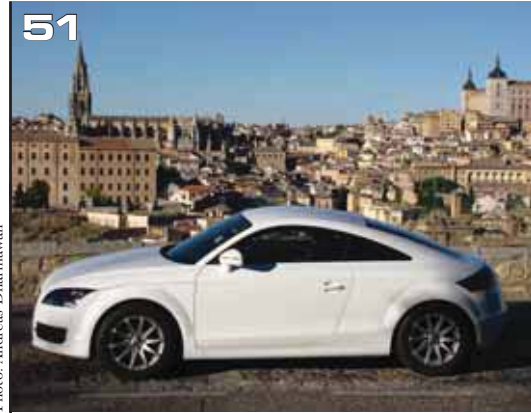


Photo: Andreas Dharmawan

Audi TT Coupe in Madrid

Spain to Portugal in a **TT Coupe**



by *Andreas Dharmawan*, photos by author

MADRID

TRAFFIC AT GRAND VIA NEAR PLAZA DE España Metro station is heavy and moving at a snail's pace. Crowds are seen on most major intersections waiting impatiently to cross the streets. City street lights and billboards light the area and illuminate Spanish architecture's intricate and ornate patterns, windows, gargoyles, and iron balconies. As we stroll through a maze of cobblestone alleys towards Plaza Mayor, the sounds of music and laughter bounce around the ancient stone walls. Restaurants and bars are brimming with conversations despite the fact that it is eleven o'clock Sunday night. This effervescent night life, even on a very late school night, is the reason why we are back in Madrid. We want to rejuvenate and escape from the monotony of going to bed at nine o'clock at night and getting ready to work at six o'clock in the morning.

Arrival in Madrid

Earlier this afternoon, we arrived in Madrid Barajas airport without any clear

plan for how we would spend our ten day vacation. However, one thing that we surely had planned ahead of time was to reserve an Audi TT Coupe from Europcar.com. Our two 21-inch luggage fit nicely in the trunk with some extra room for a laptop bag and a small backpack. The privacy cover concealed our items when the fastback door was closed. Entering the cabin, I was greeted by the familiar superb interior craftsmanship. Round air vents, prototype-racing-car-style steering wheel, six-speed manual gear box, polished metal with rubber grip pedals, and black leather sport bucket seats gave us a tingling sensation; our days ahead would be filled with fun driving for sure.

Thanks to Orbitz.com, with Expedia.com and Hotels.com, we had the confidence to improvise our daily plan because it was relatively easy to find discounted hotel rooms through those internet sites in October and November. For our stay in Madrid, after browsing internet travel sites, we chose four star Hotel Barceló Torre Arias, just about 8 km to the west of



Plaza Mayor. This business boutique hotel featured contemporary modern exterior and interior designs and spacious rooms with high tech amenities. The underground secure parking was very spacious.

Plaza Mayor

After a nice stroll, we arrived at Plaza Mayor. Its area of two football fields is surrounded by three-story 18th century residential buildings with hundreds of balconies facing the square. People are still out and about at Plaza Mayor after midnight. Locals make up the majority of the crowd. In the past, this place was the site for tournaments, weddings, bullfights, and inquisition trials and executions. Fortunately today, no more executions or trials. Hip cafes, rustic Tapas restaurants, and shops selling Spanish keepsakes are the major attraction. We pick a nondescript but aromatic and crowded hole-in-the-wall Tapas bar for our supper. We sit and soak the ambience. It is very late but yet we are not tired. This place is invigorating.

Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas

The next morning, we begin our exploration by car. On the way to our first destination, Parque del Retiro, we pass the famous Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas bullring on Calle de Alcalá. It is regarded as the home of bullfighting in Spain. This brick-red-colored Neo-Mudéjar (Moorish) structure, adorned with pottery representations of the heraldic crests of the different Spanish provinces, has a seating capacity of 25,000. Nowadays, this arena is also used for music concerts and tennis tournaments.

Parque del Retiro

After finding parking space on Calle de Alfonso XII, we enter Parque del Retiro through the main west gate. This entrance leads to the manicured lawn of Plaza del Parterre—filled by sculptured trees, vibrant flower beds, and oversized statues—a tranquil place in the middle of a bustling metropolitan city. A large artificial lake near the northern entrance is very popular among families who rent boats or have picnics under shadows of big trees along the lake's perimeter.

Street performers, painters, and fortune tellers add entertainment options. Not to be missed—supposedly the only statue in Europe dedicated to Satan—El Angel



Caído, located next to the rose garden. If you are a botanist, Palacio de Cristal will be your highlight. The Medieval Greek Cross glass structure houses exotic floras from different parts of the world.

Palacio Real de Madrid and Plaza de Oriente

We are ready for our next destination, Palacio Real de Madrid. We punch in the destination to our portable Garmin Nüvi 1370/1370T that we brought from U.S. This device is equipped with not only U.S. maps but also European maps. With this gadget, finding destinations in concentric spider-web-like Madrid city streets becomes less challenging.

One of the greatest traits of an Audi sports car is that it is also a perfect daily driver. This TT Coupe lives up to that expectation. Despite its sporty stance and dynamic handling setup, the car is easy to drive. This is my first time driving in the bustling and crowded city of Madrid. Additionally, I have to rely on my GPS to know where

I am going. And yet, with this TT, I feel confident in navigating through various one-way narrow cobblestone streets and busy intersections directed by Spanish policemen.

After parking our TT underneath Plaza de Oriente, we start our exploration by foot. A row of elevated full-size sculptures depicting the Greek Zodiac lined the shady path way towards Palacio Real. As the view opens up before us, we quickly agree with the assessment of many guide books about this place. It is the largest palace in Europe with over 2000 luxuriously decorated rooms. The exterior massive Tuscan pillars and intricate carvings give the grandiose impression. Today, this palace is mostly used for state ceremonies with guided tours offered to the public.

Inside the palace, large inspiring paintings, royal armory, porcelain, watches, silverware, and antique furniture make up its precious art collections. The work of hundreds middle century exceptional artists and designers are well represented;

giving us the glimpse of the glorious past cultures and marvelous accomplishments.

In modern time, artists, designers, and engineers at Audi are making their own remarkable work of arts, design, and engineering. Since its dramatic first generation TT introduction in 1990's, the TT has won varieties of global design awards. Recently, this second generation TT attained *Drive Car of the Year*, *Top Gear Coupé of the Year 2006*, *Fifth Gear Car of the Year 2006*, *Autobild Most Beautiful Car*, and *World Design Car of the Year 2007*. Additionally, it was a finalist for *World Car of the Year*.

Temple of Debod

The sun is about to set and there is a perfect place to witness sunset in Madrid. We took a short drive to Parque del Oeste and hiked up to Temple of Debod. This temple, which originally was located not too far south of Aswan in southern



Egypt, was dissembled piece by piece, transported carefully to this spot via a ship to Valencia and a train to Madrid. Here it was reassembled to its original state. The construction of the great dam of Aswan was the reason for the move. The whole process to deconstruct, transport, and reconstruct took about four years.

Moving a master piece like Temple of Debod requires very careful planning, packing, transportation, and unpacking. Dedicated and capable teams must

collaborate closely to prevent delays and undesired incidents. Each detail plan must be rechecked by different teams to ensure proper hand-off and collaboration before the master plan is executed. Audi had similar logistical challenges when they were planning to build TT at two different factories, 650 km apart separated by mountainous regions. They not only had to figure out how to do it once but they had to figure out how to do this daily. Furthermore, since the amount of material to be transported daily was massive, the plan and the mechanism to transport had to be very efficient. Any disruption in logistics could lead to a supply chain issue that would affect production capacity, unnecessary energy waste, and finally customer satisfaction.

Today, the body shell of Audi TT is built in Ingolstadt. Győr factory in Hungary is responsible for building the engine and assembling the various

“One of the greatest traits of an Audi sports car is that it is also a perfect daily driver.”



components into a ready-for-delivery car. The shells and other components are loaded to specially-designed-for-loading-and-unloading-efficiency train cargos. A 10,000 hp Deutsche Bahn electric locomotive hauls the complete 650 meter train in a 12 hour journey through Bavaria, Austria, and Hungary. The shells will come back two days later as completed cars.

With just-in-time manufacturing, efficiency and reliability of shipment are the essence as part stocks are kept very low. While the first set of body shells make their way into the assembly line at Győr, the fully assembled TTs are loaded into the emptied cargos. Additionally, they are stacked in accordance with an integrated and intelligent plan for direct transport to end customers.

Going back to Temple of Debod, this small chapel dating back to 2nd century BC was dedicated to the God Amun. Reflection pools were added to this temple's new home flanking the two tall, narrow stone gateways leading to the chapel. The reflection of the blood orange sun on the pools accentuates the temple's dark brown stone, the hieroglyphics on the wall, and the deep blue sky above. It is a mystical view indeed.

TOLEDO

We got up early because we had a long but exciting drive to Cordoba with a stop at the medieval town of Toledo, 70 km south of Madrid. The drive to Toledo is far from exciting because we are part of the commuter traffic and the highways are mostly straight and flat. However, the comfort and the agile nature of the TT make the trip fun.

The historic walled-town of Toledo sits majestically above Tagus River. Its history goes back to the Bronze Age and Roman time. The best way to explore this town is by getting lost in it. Puerta de Bisagra is the main entrance on the northern side. Its Moorish architecture is characterized by horseshoe arches and decorated tiles. The square parapets at the top of the walls remind us of the original function of this gate.

Narrow and hilly cobblestone alleys spread in spider web style from many plazas. Tall stone structures obstruct the view of the sun, making it easy to become lost. Walking through this maze one cannot help wonder what may

have happened in the nook and crannies over the past two thousand years. I wish these ancient walls could speak.

Visitors will notice the abundance of medieval swords, daggers, knives, and body armors at many gift shops. Since Roman times, Toledo thrived in the metal industry. It enjoyed a great boom between 15th and 17th centuries and its products were regarded to be the best in Europe. Craftsmen were highly regarded as they produced the most sought after swords and daggers in Europe at that time. A consortium was created among the craftsmen to monitor and ensure the best quality of work.

In this peaceful time, Audi metallurgists pioneered and perfected unique and advanced techniques to bond two different metals that have different characteristics. A8 and R8 have aluminum bodies while A4, A5, and Q7 have new high tech ultra strength steel bodies. Through the masterful

metallurgy techniques, Audi brought the best of aluminum and steel together in TT. The TT front end and the cabin are made of aluminum, while the rear sub-assembly, the door and the rear fastback door are made of steel. The extra rearward mass from the use of steel gives balanced weight distribution between the front and the rear axle.

Leaving the city, we take the scenic route on the southern hill to get a panoramic glimpse of the walled city. There are many vista points located on Paseo de la Rosa. From here, we admire the valley, the river below, and the enigmatic ancient city skyline perching on the top of the hill across the valley. It is a perfect postcard view.

CÓRDOBA

There are two ways to get to Córdoba from Toledo. First option is to get to A-4 South freeway all the way to Cordoba. Second option is to take the undivided





highway N-401, N-420, and then A-4 freeway just outside Córdoba. The latter is shorter by 42 km but will take about 30 minutes longer according to our GPS. Because the whole trip is about four and half hours and it is still mid-afternoon, we decide to take the more adventurist route. Hopefully, it will be scenic and twisty.

N-401 is mostly deserted, and pastoral landscape is the main theme. N-420 south of Almodóvar del Campo town starts to pick up elevation. We are entering the rocky Sierra de Alcúdia. The slow straight climb becomes fast bends. Soon, we are enjoying switch backs and occasional hair pins. Shifting gear manually from second to third and fourth and then back to third and second never felt this great. This is the moment when I wish automatic transmission was never invented. Rolling peaks and valleys covered by green lush shrubs accentuate our driving enjoyment.

Power-to-weight ratio is the key to efficiency in racing or spirited driving.

Because TT Coupé only weighs about 1.3 tons, it doesn't need a mega horse power engine to give its driver a tingling sensation. The TT we are driving has the European 1.8 liter normally aspirated engine. It is the cleanest engine in TT line up producing only 149 g/km of CO₂. But yet, it can still accelerate from 0 to 100 km in 7.2 seconds, which is about one second slower than the 2.0 TFSI version with the same six-speed manual transmission.

NH Amistad Cordoba

NH Amistad Cordoba Hotel is located in the historic old town, next to the 14th century Synagogue, the 8th century Great Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, and near the 1st century B.C. Roman Bridge. Due to its location, deep inside the ancient city, getting there is like treasure hunting. Our GPS gives us doubtful instructions. Pedestrians must wait for us to squeeze our TT into some crevices in the ancient walls and through the long narrow cobblestone alley.

We were greeted by a smiling door man. Staying at this hotel is like taking a time travel journey. This 18th century neo-classical manor house features arches, wood crafted ceilings, and a Mujedar interior courtyard. Our room was surprisingly spacious, featuring Spanish tiled floor and decorative tiled bathroom walls.


Great Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba

The next morning, after plenty of rest, we begin our tour of Cordoba. Because we stayed in the center of the historic district, we left our car beneath the hotel. Originally, the great Mosque-Cathedral was constructed in 600 AD as a Roman temple dedicated to Visigothic cathedral. In the 8th century after a new ruler arrived, a mosque was constructed which took two centuries to complete. Finally, in the 13th century a cathedral was inserted into this immense structure by Christian conquerors. Because thousands of architects and builders from differing cultures had poured their passions over centuries of generations, the interior of this Mosque-Cathedral is impressive and yet odd at the same time.

The first amazing sight is the "forest" of granite and marble pillars with red and white horseshoe-shaped double arches that go on as far as the eyes can see; giving the impression that this building goes into infinity.

Thousands of small oil lights and a few bright sun beams stream diagonally through domes' windows located high above created enigmatic shadows. Towards the center, a Baroque mahogany choir pulpit stood incongruously under a five story high cathedral ceiling. A few steps in another direction, a domed shrine of Byzantine mosaics, the Mihrab, sparkle. On the perimeter, many gold decorated small chapels ensure that there is no unused empty space.

NEXT DESTINATION: LISBON, PORTUGAL

Cordoba is famous for its creamy Gazpacho. The rich flavors of ripe and fresh tomatoes, roasted red peppers, garlic, Spanish saffron, cumin, and virgin olive oil create delicious one-of-a-kind soup. While tasting this delicious soup, we plot our next destination: Lisbon, Portugal. The drive will take about six hours, and we look forward to it in this beautiful TT. 

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