

Audi DRIVER

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**RS4
SPECIAL**



e-tron 2 = R4?



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Paul Harris looks back on some early experiences with the original RS4



Biturbo tales

I'VE NEVER OWNED an RS4, but I have driven quite a few and written about a lot more. My first experience behind the wheel was at the international press launch which took place in Bavaria in the last week of May, 2000. After our flight to Munich, the day began with Werner Frowein and Stephan Reil, respectively the MD and Technical Director of quattro GmbH, telling us about the development of the car, and then we paired up to put it through its paces. I had been pretty critical of some aspects of the S4, but the RS4 was a far more impressive package, not only in terms of performance, but particularly in the way it handled and stopped. Before we went out to the cars, a few of us asked Reil whether the cars were limited to 155 mph; he smiled and pointed out

that sometimes the rev limiters were a little out!

Well, we found out just how much they were out later in the day when my co-driver timed us with a stopwatch between kilometre posts on the Nurnberg to Ingolstadt autobahn. Whenever traffic allowed, we were getting consistent results of 280 kph or 175 mph, the fastest I had driven on public roads up till that time.

What was so impressive was the rate

at which the RS4 would attain that speed, its stability, and the fact that the brakes would chop down the speed as soon as someone pulled out into the outside lane ahead of us. I still have the notebook in which I recorded that maximum speed and, next to it, I have written that the theoretical unlimited top speed of the standard car was 290 kph (181.25 mph), a fact passed on by one of the engineers.

At the time it was launched, the RS4 had the highest specific output of any production car, at 141 bhp/litre. In comparison, the Porsche 3.6 Turbo had 115, the Aston Martin V8 Vantage (whose engine was also assembled by Cosworth at Wellingborough) had 113, and the Ferrari 360 Modena had 111.

The next time I drove one it was on British number plates, at the UK

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launch. The on-the-road price for Britain had just been announced: £46,500, which was expensive at the time but still much lower than anything else with that sort of performance. This time I shared the car with Jeremy Walton, a very capable quick driver, and we both loved the way in which it handled, although both of us reckoned that the ride, on our minor roads, was pretty harsh.

The whole question of the ride quality was tied up with the RS4's multi-spoke wheels. Not long after going on sale, we started hearing reports of buckled wheels and I remember meeting one owner, who lived in central London, having a new set fitted by his dealer and then finding them buckled in the same way after only a week or two. The concern of owners was growing and I still have the official workshop bulletin issued at that time. It states:

For safety reasons the material specifications of the 18-inch low cross section tyres were designed, so that the wheel is plastically deformed in the wheel rim flange when inappropriately driving over an extreme obstacle. The driver notices this non-safety-related deformation by steering wheel vibrations.



This measure aims at avoiding safety-related damage to axle and suspension parts as well as the body structure. An analysis of complete wheels sent in because of complaint has confirmed the effect.

But alloys wheels must in every case be checked for the following symptoms:

- a) Direct damage/deformation because of contact with the kerb or similar obstacles.*
- b) Wheel deformation on the flange without external, visible damage on the outer flange.*
- c) Correct balancing.'*

The bulletin then goes on to say that, in the case of (a), the complaint cannot be settled under warranty (which is quite understandable), and that in the case of (b), there would be a one-off warranty entitlement. The bulletin went on, however, to say that, in repeat or multiple complaints, 'abuse' can be safely assumed.

That didn't help those whose second sets of wheels were also buckling under the strain and there was even talk of law suits by some owners. Eventually, Audi UK arranged a day for owners at Millbrook, but they were still pretty cagey about the whole affair and my request to attend was denied. The meeting of owners was addressed by Kevin Rose, then director of Audi UK, and by Stephan Reil who had come over from quattro GmbH, as well as some from the UK Vehicle Inspectorate. Reports from the meeting suggested that they did not have an easy time of it, but there was a very positive result.

To overcome the complaints, Audi offered a life-long warranty on these wheels, replacing them free of charge if they were deformed, but the situation was finally resolved by introducing a stronger version.



'I had the unenviable job of telling Jon Zammett, Audi's Head of Public Relations, that one of his most valuable cars had gone missing...'



Not long after its UK launch, I had a red RS4 on road test. I took it to France for the weekend and parked it in my drive on the Sunday evening, prior to its return to Audi in the morning. I got up on Monday morning, looked outside and there it was, gone!

I just couldn't believe it because you can't steal a car like that without having the key. When I looked in the place where I kept the car keys, those for the RS4 were missing and so were those of an A4 which I was driving at the time. I could not understand it; the doors of the house were locked and none of the windows had been damaged. It was only on close examination that I found that one of the windows had been levered open and then wedged shut again afterwards.

The local police sent someone along, not because of the car theft, but because the house had been burgled while we were asleep upstairs. I also had the unenviable job of telling Jon Zammett, Audi's Head of Public Relations, that one of his most valuable cars had gone missing.

That could have been the end of the story but two days later, my colleague Neil Birkitt was visiting Dialynx down

at Swindon. He told them what had happened and, later that afternoon I got a call to say, 'I hear that you have lost an RS4. It might be a coincidence, but we have just been 'phoned by someone offering one in bits' I asked if they had a contact number and, if they did, to say that they knew someone who would pay a good price if the car was still in one piece. A short while later came the reply: 'Yes, it is still in one piece, and it comes with the key, and the price is £10,000.'

That was the point at which I brought Audi UK up to date with developments and also spoke to the police in Luton where they had a specialist car theft team.

A day later, Kim Collins of qst down in Haywards Heath rang me to say that he, too, had been offered a red RS4. What he said next amazed me. 'You know who it is.' He then told me that it was two men from Luton who had actually visited our office a short while before to give us details of a car they wished to advertise. They had even used the same mobile number when talking to the two specialists as they had used in the advertisement!

As you can imagine, the police team

in Luton then went into top gear, obtained search and arrest warrants and took both men in for questioning. Sadly, that was as far as it went because, despite a four-day search, the car could not be found and, as there was no other direct evidence, the men had to be released. One of the officers told me that the car was probably in one of the many lock-up garages in Luton, but they no longer had the right to inspect them. 'Once upon a time,' he said, 'we could have gone round with an endoscope probe and pushed it under the doors of suspect lock-ups, but we can't do that anymore.'

End of story? No quite. In late summer of that year, the RS4 was found in the entrance to a field near Maidenhead, burned out. I suspect that, with the arrest, it had been considered too hot to be moved and had remained in a lock up until it was decided to get rid of it.

One other interesting fact came along. When looking for the car, the police asked if it was fitted with any sort of tracking mechanism, which it wasn't, and then went on to ask whether there was any way in which the car's navigation system could be

Jay Kay was one of the first RS4 owners



used to track it down. This was another dead end, but I then heard a rumour, which subsequently turned out to be untrue, that the engine had been removed and fitted in a normal-looking A4 Avant. The police told me that, if this was true, and if the engine could be identified as coming from the stolen car, they were prepared to find it, take it in and then have the engine stripped down.

I got in touch with my contacts at the Cosworth assembly plant in Wellingborough and asked the question. I was told that, when Cosworth built the engines for Ford, virtually every single part was numbered. In contrast, not a single component of the RS4 engine was marked in this way.

That was not a very pleasant episode, particularly when you know that someone has been walking about in your house while you are asleep. We asked the police if it would be better to keep the keys upstairs but were told not to consider such a move. 'If they can't find them easily, they are likely to come upstairs and make you tell them where the keys are.'

I know of at least two *Audi Driver* readers who had similar RS4 experiences,

one being assaulted in a car park in order to steal the keys. Very sensibly, he already had Tracker fitted to the car and it was recovered within 40 minutes.

All my other experiences of RS4s have been far more pleasant and, on one visit to qst, I drove a particularly fast green example whose owner had lavished tons of money on it to give it a top speed in excess of 180 mph.

There will always be some contention about which is the best, the Biturbo or the V8 RS4. I won't take sides in that argument, but the V6 version had the great advantage of being a strictly limited edition. 3,900 were built altogether,

with just 400 being imported officially into Britain. No such limit was put on the V8 version, or on the RS6.

They have held their price well and, when the RS4 was launched, Bill Carter, Editor of Glass's AutoProVision, said: 'Used RS4s will fetch more than list price for some time to come and with fetch well over 50 per cent of list at three years/60,000 miles.' It was also pointed out that, at the time, six year-old RS2s were still fetching over 60 per cent of list price. Andrew Chapple has written a buyer's guide for the RS4 in this issue and you can refer to it for details of current prices. 

