

4x4 OF THE YEAR

2004 • CROSSOVER GROUP •

1st

AUDI ALLROAD 2.7 T QUATTRO



Another outright win for the outrageous Audi, which excited us more than anything else in this group, just as it did in last year's gathering of cross-country favourites. There's no disguising that the allroad is just a reworking of the A6 Avant estate, with shiny plastic underneath to look like a sump guard and a matt-finish roof for off-road character, but all that really matters is the way twin-turbo V6 powers through the legendary quattro four-wheel drive system to deliver so much driving enjoyment over a quickly-taken stretch of dirt road. As ever with the quattro system, which dates its origins back to early World Rally Championship successes and splits torque equally between front and rear axles, the allroad seems a little front-heavy, but this only helps add to the feeling of high-speed stability through fast curves since it's reluctant to throw its tail out and simply comes back into line if overstretched nerves see you back off or brake.

MONEY WELL SPENT

The allroad sits solidly on tarmac as well, easily out-accelerating all but the hottest hatches, confidently out-cornering any two-wheel drive road-racer, riding firmly but comfortably and cruising with admirable refinement. But it really comes into its own on loose gravel surfaces, where the assured quattro traction, constantly kept under control by a Torsen-type centre diff that locks automatically at any sign of wheelspin, ensures maximum grip under all conditions. Working with the Torsen diff is electronic traction

control, which proves particularly effective in slippery mud or icy conditions, giving the allroad an almost incredible ability to keep pulling through even on its road tyres. The standard-fit tyres are actually a clever dual tread design for quiet, high-traction on-road performance as well as enhanced grip off road.

The allroad can only go so far into uncharted wilderness, however, because of its low ground clearance, even when the air suspension is pumped to full height. Axle articulation is minimal, also affecting the Audi's ability to cross terrain, the traction control far less effective with only two or three wheels in contact with the ground.

Low-range gearing is a costly option, but this should not be considered as a useful tool to aid the allroad's limited off-road agility which has more to do with ground clearance than a lack of torque. It would, of course, allow the car to tackle steep climbs and descents with better control, but would probably be of greater value helping the Allroad cope with its 2,100kg towing capability.

The Audi is the most expensive car in this group, but the superb build quality should ensure good resale value, as long as it doesn't get trashed off road. Equipment matches the price, however, from the climate control, powered seat adjustment and CD system looking after occupant comfort to the anti-lock brakes and side airbags for safety. Meanwhile, the allroad is also a perfectly practical family estate with comfortable seating for five and a useful cargo bay, allowing it to share day-to-day transport with occasional high-performance forays into the great outdoors.

SPECIFICATIONS

Price:	£33,080
Engine cc/bhp:	2671/250
Transmission:	6-speed manual, permanent 4WD

RATINGS (0-10)

Comfort:	8
Refinement:	9
Off-road:	5
Value:	8
Style:	6
TOTAL:	36

WE LIKED: Gusty power
WE DISLIKED: Poor ground clearance

