

EV models are variously adding to, paralleling, echoing, eclipsing or erasing existing fuel-powered vehicles in lineups worldwide (all with one eye fixed on the crystal ball, with factors of production and adoption all in flux).

The first Audi e-tron (small “e”), revealed in the US just over five years ago, was a new breed, an add-on to all that existed. And as a lone wolf model, Audi e-tron was its full name.

But this is now taking a lane change. A new Q4 e-tron was revealed about a year after the original e-tron and launched for model year 2022. It was also all-new, but this time named to merge into the existing lineup of Q SUVs. There is no non-EV Q4, so if you say Q4, it can only be the Q4 e-tron, making it more of an expansion or echo model.

Continue forward to model year 2023, and the bigger original e-tron was renamed the Q8 e-tron. Not only does this slot into the greater Q family, as Q4 e-tron had, but this time had a new twist—it shares its name with non-e-tron versions of Q8. If it's internal combustion, it's a Q8; if it's an EV, it's a Q8 e-tron—more of a parallel model positioning.

The whole thing is an echo from Audi almost 45 years ago, when they introduced the first quattro,

the original coupe, known simply as Audi Quattro. Or so it was until quattro all-wheel-drive was added to others—the 4000 quattro, 5000 quattro and so on. Now, all are quattros (yet all still bear this as an add-on to their names). This is basically exactly what is on track now with e-tron.

(A distinction or two: the original Quattro model was capitalized, but the term has gone lower-case ever since, while e-tron has been all lower-case all along—even that first stand-alone e-tron, unlike that first Quattro. With reference to the first one now less clear, it's often called the ur-Quattro [German prefix for original] or Quattro Coupe. What the first e-tron will be known as remains to be seen.)

Audi's quattro all-wheel drive is about power, performance, balance and traction. It's been years since Audi offered front-drive (at least in our market), but it was inherently positioned downstream from quattro. Now, the variables run upstream. For Q8, fuel-fired variants are based on three performance levels—regular, S and RS—while EVs come in two performance levels—regular or S—but also two body variants (a common box-SUV and a coupe-like SUV alternative called the Sportback).

In the broader matrix, Q8 e-tron is the lineup's

least pricey EV, while surprisingly only \$700 more than the least pricey gasoline Q8.

You can run up your luxe and your price from there, as our sample does with \$10,400 for Prestige (a trim level on others, but here achieved as a package) and a Launch Edition package for \$2,750 more. These bring it up to SQ8 e-tron base pricing, but of course you can add similarly to an S. (The SQ8 e-tron will be a later arrival, any time now.)

But the Q8 e-tron has solid power, acceleration and recharge times. (Bonus: Audi is now including two years of Electrify America DC fast charging.)

Audi's style evolution has always been gradual, but over time distinct. Perhaps until now. They pioneered big, brand-distinctive grilles, which swept across the industry. And their four-ring logo (though rooted in a four-brand merger long ago) was perfect for quattro. On Q8 e-tron, basic elements up front—grille, lights, vents—take up almost all the available real estate, and shapes are secondary. If you removed the logo, you might not know what it was, and they've even given that a head start—

new “two-dimensional rings” are under a smooth membrane, seen as just a blob from some reflective angles. Oddest (though coolest) of all is a light bar across the top of the grille, which comes on only along with certain exterior light settings—stylish when lit, but a gaping void when it's not.

The ride is quite good atop redesigned steering and suspension (we did not get to compare old and new back-to-back). Two motors, front and rear, grant it the quattro name, while it's rear-biased in most conditions (preferable to Audi's earlier front bias).

The turning circle seemed very tight in the real world (one of our favorite attributes), though its spec is 40 feet (several feet larger than a compact sedan, while on a wheelbase only inches longer)—a spec we will seek to confirm or correct.

Tight u-turns aside, we were impressed by road handling—no awkward front geometry feedback, just smooth cornering that echoes quattro itself. An exception to this was in a roundabout, a quick right-left-right wiggle that amplified itself throughout. Our philosophy is that any vehicle experience should be optimum out of the box, with modes only adding specialized performance, but that's seldom the case. Here, we were curious enough to pull

2024 AUDI Q8 LINEUP

GASOLINE	Q8	\$73,700
	SQ8	96,600
	RS Q8	125,800
ELECTRIC (EV)	Q8 e-tron	74,400
	Q8 Sportback e-tron	77,800
	SQ8 e-tron	89,800
	SQ8 Sportback e-tron	92,600

off, change from auto to dynamic, then power through those roundabouts again. Success. We followed suit for quick lane changes on multi-lane streets and freeways, with the same improvement.

Highly engineered bits added to the chassis all perform very well. The chassis itself, as on pretty much any clean-sheet EV, bears the stiffness guaranteed by a big rectilinear battery and the platform supporting it. This was clear in the Q8 e-tron when—despite very slow speed—we encountered certain speed bumps, or even the almost-unmeasurable edge of a concrete apron meeting asphalt, which could be remarkably harsh.

Overall, the Audi Q8 e-tron delivered the quick, smooth, pedal-to-power “magic carpet ride” common to powerful EVs, while delivering our longstanding mixed metaphor for a well-executed Audi quattro—that it “rides like a cat on rails.” ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ASSEMBLY	Brussels, Belgium
MOTOR/TRANS BUILD	Hungary / Hungary
CONTENT	Hungary 53% / Germany 16%
MOTORS	asynchronous, front/rear
BATTERY	397V Li-ion, 114/106 kWh gross/net, 432 prismatic cells, 36 modules, alum case, extruded alum reinforcements
POWER	402 hp
TRANSMISSION	single-speed
DRIVETRAIN	quattro AWD
0-TO-60 / TOP SPEED	5.4 sec / 124 mph
SUSPENSION	F: 5-link; R: 5-link
STEERING	electromech, speed-dep assist
BRAKES	F: 15.7 vented, 6-piston calipers; R: 13.8 vented, single-piston caliper
WHEELS	(opt) 21-in 5-arm aero metallic black
TIRES	(opt) 265/45 R21 108H XL all-season
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	193.5 / 115.1 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	8.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	40.0 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.1 / 38.6 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	40.8 / 39.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	28.5 / 56.4 cu ft
WEIGHT	5798 lb
TOW CAPACITY	4000 lb
CHARGING	Level 2 9.6 kW 240V 40A: 13 hrs Level 2 119.2 kW 240V 80A: 6.5 hrs DC Fast Charging: (10-80%) 31 min
RANGE: EPA	285 mi (note: 300 mi on Sportback with ultra pkg)
MPG	(MPGe) 80/83/81 (city/hwy/comb)
BASE PRICE (2023)	\$74,400
PAINT	Daytona Gray Pearl Effect: 595
PRESTIGE PKG	(incl Premium Plus): B&O 3D audio, vented front seats, virtual 360° top view camera, phone box light; (adds Prestige): singleframe projector lighting, digital matrix LED headlights, Valcona/Milano leather seats, indiv contour massaging front seats, intelligent park assist: 10400
LAUNCH EDITION	21-in 5-arm aero structure metallic black wheels, S line exterior, black roof rails, mirror housings and exterior trim, mesh anthracite inlays, Valcona/Milano leather interior adds piping: 2750
AC CHARGING PKG	1850
REAR SIDE AIRBAGS	400
DESTINATION CHARGE	1195
TOTAL	\$91,590

2024 AUDI COMPLETE SUV LINEUP

Q3	Q3	\$37,000
Q4	Q4 e-tron	EV 49,800
	Q4 Sportback e-tron	EV 58,200
Q5	Q5	44,600
	Q5 Sportback	51,500
	SQ5	57,000
	SQ5 Sportback	59,900
Q7	Q7	59,500
	SQ7	90,400
Q8	Q8	73,700
	SQ8	96,600
	RS Q8	125,800
Q8 e-tron	Q8 e-tron	EV 74,400
	Q8 Sportback e-tron	EV 77,800
	SQ8 e-tron	EV 89,800
	SQ8 Sportback e-tron	EV 92,600

# ELECTRIC ECHO

AUDI E-TRON MODELS JOIN MAINSTREAM LINEUP  
BY JOE SAGE

