

Teuton brothers



Audi's Q7 shares the platform with two other Germans, the VW Touareg and the Porsche Cayenne. A fourth German, Dieter Losskarn, cruised in the spacious SUV from the Highveld to the Lowveld to find out how the Q7 compares to its siblings.



Without low ratio, it's not as serious an off-roader as its Teuton brothers, the Cayenne and Touareg

A couple of months ago, I tried to describe

how it feels to drive the fascinating Porsche Cayenne Turbo by likening it to dating an attractive super-model in high heels, who goes hiking with you in lousy weather, drinks beer, watches television and cooks your favourite meals to perfection. Well, after climbing the Limpopo escarpment, south of Louis Trichardt, in a vehicle that shares its platform with

the Cayenne and the Touareg, I discovered that woman. Not only does she prepare a delicious potato dish, but she's down-to-earth and, yes, strikingly beautiful. Barend Lombard has the human equivalent of the Q7 in Mirinda, an ex-police inspector whom he naturally married straight away. I can picture her replacing Angelina Jolie in a screen adaptation of a new Lincoln Rhyme novel, her FBI

The low-down

Audi Q7 3,6 V6 FSI

Price: from R550 000

Engine: 3,6-litre V6, 206kW, 280hp. Other options are: a 4,2-litre V8 (R643 000) and two diesels, the 3,0-litre V6 TDI (R566 000) and the new 4,2-litre V8 TDI (R710 000). Most of the features mentioned are expensive add-ons, meaning the price tag isn't as competitive as it seems at first glance.

0-100 km/h: 8,5 secs

Top speed: 225 km/h (220 km/h with adaptive air suspension)

Consumption/100 km: 13,5 litres

Fuel tank: 100 litres

Tank range: 740 km

Ground clearance: 240 mm

Approach angle: 21° (with air suspension 24°)

Departure angle: 23° (with air suspension 25°)

Wading depth: 500 mm (535 mm with air suspension)

For more information: www.audi.co.za

For the same amount of money (R550 000), you could buy:

a VW Touareg 3,0 V6 TDI Tiptronic at R528 000

a Porsche Cayenne at R595 000

a Landrover Discovery 3 2,7-litre V6 TD SE at R510 000

a Mercedes ML350 at R545 000

windbreaker rustling in the breeze while checking a crime scene or taking out perps with her Glock....

Barend and Miranda own and run the wonderful Last Post Reserve, south of Louis Trichardt. It's built mostly from natural rocks atop a koppie with a great view. There are several luxury tents and stone houses to choose from, a huge kitchen and braai area and a rustic bar with an attached natural indoor rock pool. It's an ideal place for a group of friends. Barend has a couple of 4x4 tracks, but the Q7 didn't seem to like off-road that much.

Sure, it's an all-wheel-drive SUV with an automatically self-locking central diff-lock which, by means of the adaptive air suspension, the ground clearance can be raised up to 240mm. But without low ratio, it's not as serious an off-roader as its Teuton brothers, the Cayenne and Touareg. And it obviously doesn't want to get dirty. The Q7 feels much more comfortable on tarmac than off.

I certainly had a lot of fun between Dullstroom and Lydenburg and up the Long Tom Pass, which reaches almost alpine heights. The radar early-warning system worked well in this area, with oncoming traffic alerting me in time about concealed speed traps in unexpected 60km/h zones. Approaching Abel Erasmus Pass, I had to pass some slow-moving trucks and the 3,6-litre V6 was powerful enough to move the Q7's weight quickly past them.

The electronically controlled damping system can be set manually or put on automatic. This lowers and stiffens the car on smooth tar and lifts it out of harm's way off-road. However, in order to select off-road mode or change the suspension, you can't just push a button in the dash. You have to go into the MMI (Multi Media Interface) system's display.

As expected, the Q7 is loaded with features, such as ESP and RSP (roll stability programme), but to mention them all would take too much space. Let's concentrate on some of the best stuff. A very useful feature is the optional side assist. Designed to eliminate blind spots, it flashes a yellow light in the side-view mirrors whenever a vehicle approaches from behind and you are about to change a lane. It works with intelligent radar technology linked to two sensors in the rear bumper which monitor the area next to and behind the Q7.

It takes a while to get used to Audi's optional advanced parking system (APS), which incorporates a camera into the tailgate. The image pops up without wide-angle distortion on the MMI display, complete with color-coded guidelines, and is activated as soon as the Q7 is put into reverse. It feels a bit like a video game with all the moving lines. I must admit I still prefer the old-fashioned way of turning my head around to reverse.

Of great help is the built-in hill descent system which operates in off-road mode to control the downhill



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speed by using the ABS system. There's also a hill-start function which keeps the car steady on a steep slope until the driver moves his foot from brake to accelerator.

And the looks? The dashboard layout is similar to that of the A6 and A8 and of superior quality, with an attractive combination of wood and aluminium. The exterior is quite different

Designed to eliminate blind spots, it flashes a yellow light in the side-view mirrors whenever a vehicle approaches



from the competition. With its super-sized grille, the SUV has enormous presence. It's a safe, sophisticated and spacious family tank for driving long distances in absolute comfort.

So whether you choose the Q7, the Touareg or the Cayenne depends very much on your personal taste and preferences. For myself, the vehicle was almost too perfect, but I wouldn't agree with Jeremy Clarkson, of *Top*

Gear, who described the Q7 as one of the worst cars he has ever driven.

In a Cayenne, I would definitely have asked Mirinda to pose on the bonnet in the last afternoon light, but with the Q7 this didn't seem appropriate. I chose a big candelabra tree instead. Mirinda was elsewhere, cooking up a delicious meal under a velvet sky, which was soon twinkling with stars of another sort. ■

footnotes

Where to stay \$\$ Summit Lodge in Graskop offers some rustic rondavels. Owner Andre is a keen motorbiker, so about half of his clients arrive on two wheels. B&B rates start from R290 a person a night sharing. Tel 013-767-1058, fax 013-767-1895, web www.summitlodge.co.za.

\$\$\$\$ Mohlabetsi Safari Lodge in the Balule Nature Reserve, integrated into the Greater Kruger Park, is a great destination. Rates start from R1 500 a person a night sharing, including all meals and game drives. Tel 015-793-2166, fax 015-793-9023, web www.mohlabetsi.co.za.

\$\$\$ Glenshiel Hotel is a historic place with an English country house feel in the Magoebaskloof area. B&B rates start from R375 a person a night sharing. Tel. 015-276-4335, fax 015-276-4338, web www.glenshiel.co.za.

\$\$ Last Post Nature Reserve is a rustic, luxurious and very affordable self-catering lodge with big kitchen, braai area, bar and two pools in the Limpopo escarpment, south of Louis Trichardt. It is built into the rocks of a koppie and has a great view. It sleeps 18 adults and can be booked by groups. Rates start from R180 a person a night sharing. Tel. 082-376-998, web www.lastpost.co.za.

Next month in *Wheels*: We race a couple of Volvos across a frozen lake near Sweden's northernmost city, Kiruna, while temperatures hover around -30°C; a really cool experience.

Boys' toys

Keeping cool

Engel has been around for quite a while and has proved its worth. The company has just introduced its new range of 12V fridges, combined with the new slide-out system from Fronrunner. For the different sizes (and prices), check out www.fronrunner.co.za.



Glasshole fixed

If you have a stone chip or crack on your car's windscreen, it might not be necessary to get the whole thing replaced. You can fix it easily with a GoGo Auto DIY kit, which can be used on all types of laminated windscreens and prevents further damage if applied as soon as a chip appears. The applicator injects a durable resin into the glass to minimise damage and produces an almost unblemished appearance. The formula works most effectively on small, round indents of not more than 2,5 cm in diameter. Available for R150. Web www.gogoauto.co.za.

Hit the roof

Fronrunner is almost synonymous with roof racks in South Africa. The most attractive one so far is the sleek Wind-Cheetah Slimline. The black powder-coated, aluminium, low-profile roof rack not only looks great, but is durable, despite the low weight. There is a roof rack option for almost every 4x4 available. Fronrunner is so convinced about its product that it'll give you a five-year warranty. Expect to pay between R3 000 and R5 000, depending on which vehicle you are driving. More information at www.fronrunner.co.za.



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If you have photographs of a 4x4 getting stuck, e-mail them to wheels@getaway.co.za or post them to Getaway

Wheels, PO Box 180, Howard Place, 7450 Cape Town. You could win a Nissan Secure Tech Survival Kit worth R1 000, comprising an Off-Road Tactix manual and DVD, as well as a recovery bag with pull strap, shackles and a pair of gloves. ■

