



2017 Audi R8 Spyder a fusion of power and aggression

Do you want to feel like Santa Claus everyday? Buy an Audi R8 Spyder. It will cost you \$238,000, but you will be sprinkling stardust everywhere you go.

Audi's super sports car looks like nothing else on the road and sounds like it was tuned by engineers on mind-altering drugs.

What else can explain my experience when I went to visit friends at their cottage on Lake Erie.

Arrival was the calm before the storm. We arrived without fanfare in the middle of the afternoon. Most people were at the beach. We had put the R8 on tame mode, which put a mute on the exhaust.

Departure was the storm. I started up the Spyder and sparks started to fly. There's a button on the centre console that looks like the bulging eyes of a praying mantis. Push it, floor it and the restraint comes off the



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exhaust. All the best things about a race car – the whine, the growl, the metal-eating ratcheting sound you can't explain – it all combines in a fusion soup of power and aggression.

Suddenly people started shuffling out of their cottages, screen doors banged, kids dropped their bikes on the sidewalk. Within five minutes we were surrounded by people so entranced it evoked a zombie apocalypse.

Adults were smitten, but kids were crazy in love with the R8.

"Can Nathan sit behind the wheel?"

"Will you let Elora get in the passenger seat?"

2017 Audi R8 Spyder

Base Price: \$198,100

Price as Tested: \$236,635

Engine Type: 5.2-litre V10

Power: 610 hp

Torque: 413 lb.-ft.

Fuel Consumption: 17 L/100 km (city); 8.7 L/100 km (highway)

What's Best: Sound, speed, handling, naturally aspirated engine

What's Worst: Limited seat adjustments

What's Interesting: The cabin and insulated soft-top are designed to allow for normal-volume conversations at 250 km/h.

And so it went during my week test-driving the Spyder, one billionaire experience after another.

For a car that can put onlookers into a stupefied trance, the Audi R8 is remarkably civilized to drive. Sure, it can do zero to 100 km/h in a ridiculous 3.3 seconds, thanks to that grand V10 engine and 610 horsepower, but by selecting comfort drive mode it can poke around town over impoverished roads and not bruise your body.

It's soothing to know that comfort mode is

available, but driving in sport or sport-plus mode is the hip place to be. It is heaven to unleash the V10 and let the seven-speed dual clutch automatic transmission whip through gear changes.

For a few seconds you can feel the high of driving a race car. With the grip of all-wheel drive, the surgical steering and rigid body, the R8 handles flawlessly. It makes you feel like a skilled driver, when in reality you have barely asked the car to use one-tenth of its capabilities.

The cabin reeks of money and good taste with its deep-dish seats, and dash moulded like a fine musical instrument. But get this, the driver's seat can only be adjusted fore and aft. No raising or reclining. That's a quirk of the \$7,000 Le Mans Package.

This bit of obnoxious behaviour is offset by the glorious virtual instrument panel right in front of your eyes. Every bit of info needed is right there in your line of sight, and it's all customizable. This wizardry removes the placement of a clumsy display screen in the middle of the dash, and nixes the need for a flurry of buttons and dials. Audi's interior design is legendary – save a spot in the Smithsonian for this one.

From curbside the view of the Audi R8 is not museum quality. It's become blockier, beefier and maybe a bit bloated over the years. It's still a head turner, but I'd like to see someone take a sculpting knife to it and carve a curve or a niche, something to interrupt its boxy shape.

The Spyder looks best with the top down, which only takes 20 seconds to accomplish in a mesmerizing feat of engineering.

The last day we had the R8, a neighbour asked if his son, who has autism, could sit in it. The boy has never talked to us, but his face said everything when he sat in the passenger seat. I started the car and he squealed with joy. Later, his mother told us he would look out the window every evening and say, "Good night car."

Another Santa Claus moment. 🎅

Kathy Renwald is an award-winning automotive writer, photographer and videographer.

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