

AUDI E-TRON

Needs a subhead

By Scott Rose

Can we seriously even *imagine* that the sexiest wheels on the road will ever whirl in a blur under a completely electric car?

Audi has us answering that environmentally-significant question with a super-charged yes. Often, experimental concept vehicles introduced at auto shows are ugly, tentative yawns. Yet in September, 2009, heightened excitement was palpable at the IAA in Frankfurt, Germany as Audi debuted its gleaming E-Tron. By December,

in association with the Los Angeles Auto Show, an eye-catching, high-performance prototype was whooshing up the Pacific Coast Highway along Point Mugu. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger visited that show, clearly admiring Audi's dazzling pathbreaker in electromobility. Look Ma; no tailpipes!

The German automaker previously conveyed cutting-edge ambitions when it created the RSQ fantasy car for "*i. ROBOT*" starring Will Smith. Like the RSQ, the E-Tron boasts a low-slung, sleek profile and Audi's trapezoidal, single frame front grille. Unlike that one-off RSQ, though,





scribes a bold arch over the elongated teardrops of the side windows. The windshield, meanwhile, repeats, while enlarging, the trapezoid of the grille. Light emitting diode headlights are arrayed in stylized hair-pin turns. Placement of the four horizontally intersected Audi rings above, instead of on the grille contributes to a focusing of the body's sculpturally flowing lines and surfaces.

Those four Audi circles might symbolize the E-Tron's asynchronous electric motors, one for each wheel. Torque-vectoring, in combination with all-wheel-drive, makes for breathtaking precision when cornering. Audi trumpets a walloping 3,310 lb.-ft. of torque for this car, as much as on a tank. The company's claim is truthful but controversial, as torque can be measured in different manners. Most importantly for consumers, though, as far as this issue goes; *all* of an

the E-Tron is slated for series production; the first of the run should be on the market towards the end of 2011.

Externally, the E-Tron is modeled on the Audi R8, which in turn was derived from the Lamborghini Gallardo. For most connoisseurs, this is genuine,

love-at-first-sight design. Based on space frame technology, the body projects a self-assured and virile attitude. From the strapping rectangular rear, there's vibrant sweep forward to the flared nose. The rounded wheel wells, for their part, serve visually to frame aerodynamically sculpted flanks. The roof line de-

electric car's torque is immediately available upon depressing the electricity pedal.

The E-Tron's four engines get their juice from a 1,036 pound Sanyo lithium-ion battery pack with a total output of 230 kilowatts, equivalent to 313 horse power. The pack is positioned behind the two passenger seats and in front

of the rear axle, ideal for weight distribution. Just look what happens when, under operation, this battery needs to be cooled. A variety of adaptive fins and flaps on the car's surface flex and curve upwards and outwards, akin to helical springs, admitting the rushing wind. An acrylic panel over the front grille slides out of the way too. With the battery ade-

quately cooled, these moving components all return to position, optimizing the vehicle's aerodynamics.

Think of it as lightning without the thunder. The concept E-Tron goes from zero to 62mph in 4.8 seconds, yet the only sounds produced are its swoosh, along with the relatively quiet whir of its motors. To be sure, some racing



aficionados miss the fearsome roar of a combustion engine. Others, nevertheless, embrace whatever hastens us towards greener opportunities for sports coupes. Writing in *The Los Angeles Times*, Dan Neil declared; “The production version of this car is going to be stupid fast. I predict we are looking at the future production-car re-

cord holder at (Germany’s) Nürburgring.” In order to maximize range, top speed is, at present, electronically capped at 124mph. The car’s range on a full battery is about 154 miles.

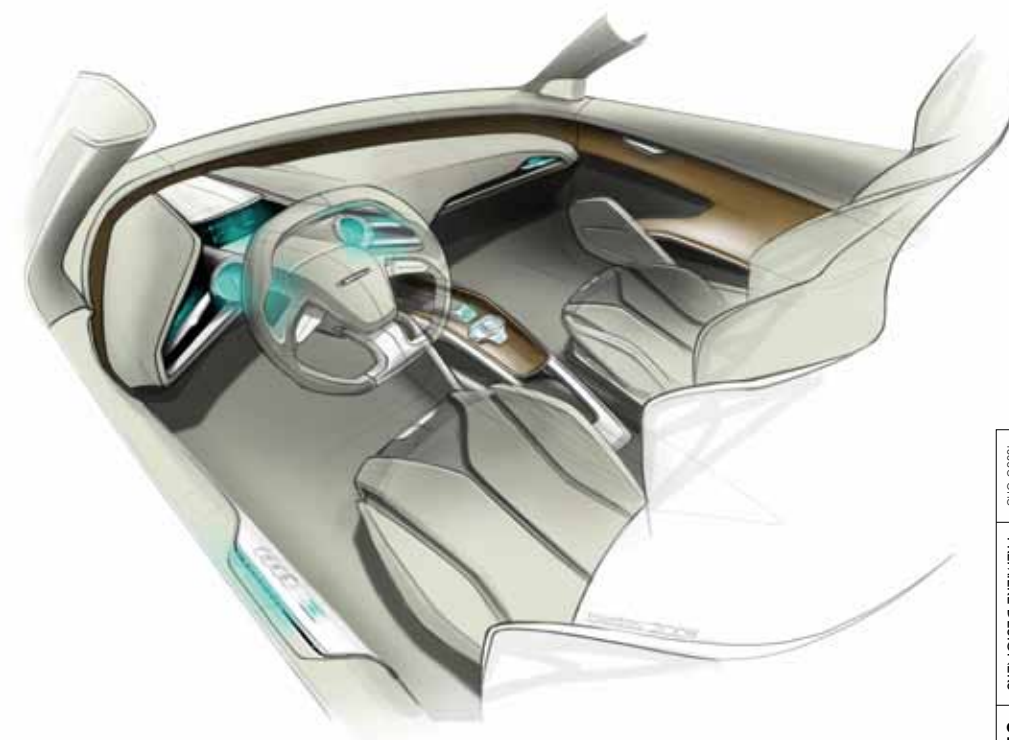
Ultimately, the E-Tron’s charger will be contained within an electric-toothbrush-like dock. Given a 400-volt circuit, the pack

can be replenished in two hours. A hinged, mirrored-chrome cover along with a soft, lime-green indicator glow spiffy up the car’s charger port, located in the center rear. Whereas one E-Tron at the recent automobile shows glittered with its tropical, tangelo colored skin, Audi referred to the E-Tron that went whizzing up the Pacific Coast



Highway as being “speed red.” For clarification, you might think of this color as a shiny, candy apple red. Cognac and cream tones dominate the interior with its leather and aluminum bucket seats.

Wave your hand under the motion-sensing door handles and they slip down out of their recesses for you. Accomplished with finesse, the passenger cabin design is at once mini-





malist and visually warm. The sculpting effects here are in pleasing accord with those of the exterior. Electric vehicles have no need of a cardan tunnel; the E-Tron's streamlined, leather-topped centerline fixture incorporates a flush gearstick that rises up automatically when the current is switched on. A liquid crystal navigational display screen, centered forward of the steering wheel, also moves into position upon start.

Can't wait for it? Playstation's newly-launched Audi Space, set in a spectacular virtual metropolis, offers *Vertical Run*, an E-Tron-based game that even now, in kids of all ages, is revving up enthusiasm for electric cars. Additionally worth noting—the German government subsidizes Audi's development of electromobility technology; the E-Tron went from the drawing boards to the road in just nine months. Major impediments to mass adaptation

of such technology, however, still include production costs, performance, recharging times and range.

Yet for design-positive drivers who wish to lead by example, Audi's E-Tron is a head turning knockout. Even parts not visible to casual observation can make a sport-coupe-lover's heart race in the best of ways. The chassis, for example, is comprised of trapezoidal wishbones at the rear axle and triangular double wishbones at the front axle, a setup that propitiates cutting-edge agility. The Pirelli P Zero, ultra-high performance tires, nice and thick, also are real lookers. As the *ne plus ultra* fashion accessory to complement your Audi E-Tron, you might wear a Pirelli P Zero chronograph diamond watch, its wristband designed to look like the vulcanized rubber on a fresh radial tire capable of zipping us all towards a greener, beautifully-designed future. **d**

