



PHOTO BY JOHN LAMM

## ***Extended-Use Report:*** **AUDI 5000 AT** **24,000 MILES**

*Reliable successor to the 100LS?*

**W**ORDS OF PRAISE about the Audi 5000 come fairly easy. In stories ranging from the U.S. version's introduction in Europe (September 1977 issue) to our road test (December 1977) and then to the 5000 winning the Best Luxury-Sports Sedan \$7500-\$11,000 category in our Ten Best Cars competition (June 1978), we have written positively about this newest sedan from Audi. Its major attributes are excellent space utilization, impressive ride and handling, and enjoyable acceleration and fuel economy, thanks to the unique 5-cylinder engine and impressively lightweight construction for a car of the 5000's size.

Then again, it was easy to heap praise on the 5000's predecessor, the Audi 100LS, when it was first brought to the U.S. in 1970 and the honors were for basically the same reasons. Yet the 100 became a great mechanical disappointment as the miles rolled along, a point that left us frustrated with that model and somewhat reluctant to give our unqualified seal of approval to the 5000. That doesn't mean we were hasty with our praise in the 5000 road test, and we did weigh liabilities of the 100 when we declared the 5000 one of the ten best; but that's only an indication of how highly we think of the new Audi and the ability of this German firm to avoid making the same mistake twice.

As you've no doubt already figured out, however, the history of the 100LS makes the 5000 an ideal subject for a long-term road test and so we ordered one to use for 48,000 miles. Briefly, our Bahama blue 4-door sedan is equipped with the 4-speed manual gearbox, cruise control, velour upholstery and such options as an

electric sunroof, vent windows (a hefty \$70 extra), air conditioner, power door locks, power windows, AM/FM stereo radio and Goodyear tires mounted on cast aluminum wheels. One item we were surprised to find a \$70 option is the tachometer; it costs extra because almost 90 percent of the 5000s sold in the U.S. have an automatic transmission. Total delivered price was \$11,375.

Our Audi 5000 arrived last August with 391 miles and a fuel leak, the latter not an option and keeping our first few fuel mileage figures in the 17-mpg range until the problem could be fixed under warranty. It was a minor hassle that didn't for a moment put off any potential users, and the popularity of the 5000 is evidenced by the fact that it took only six months for us to cover the 24,000 miles for this first report.

Another trouble we had right from the start was an incorrect speedometer, which we had checked and found to read high. At least it kept us from getting speeding tickets, but we finally paid \$30 to our local speedometer shop to have it corrected, though the problem has returned. Also we've since discovered that because the error was greater than 10 percent it would have been covered by the warranty.

A few other hassles started to crop up, like both sun visor clips breaking within 5000 miles . . . and then breaking again before the 24,000 miles was completed. The comfortable soft velour upholstery turned out to be as impractical as most such interior fabrics, particularly on those occasions when children were traveling in the car. One stain of undetermined origin remains. The electric sunroof began to balk because of improper alignment with the roof, preventing the panel from sliding rearward at every click of the switch.

Shifts from 1st to reverse and vice versa require that the clutch pedal be pushed all the way to the floor and the shift made slowly and carefully if the driver wants to avoid graunching gears. This is a characteristic of the gearbox the owner has to learn to live with. Wind noise from the driver's vent window was a problem right from the start, temporarily fixed at the 7500-mile service by putting a rubber strip under the weatherstripping to move it out further. After a while, however, the noise returned and our best answer so far has been a piece of cardboard wedged in the lock. We understand Audi now has a fix for this problem which we'll have done at the next service.

Rear seat headrests obscure rear outward vision and some



drivers removed them, something that even Audi did on all 1979 5000s for the same reason; they are again available though only on the full-option 5000S. The aluminum window frame trim is discoloring from the solutions used in commercial car washes, and as the fuel tank approaches empty, the engine tends to stumble when the car is driven through long right-hand turns, obviously a problem with fuel pickup.

The air conditioning stopped producing cold air after 20,000 miles, and though the system has been recharged and the electrics checked, all is not right and it will have to be looked after again. Other little niggling problems included an instrument panel light that only seemed to work properly when a mechanic looked at it (yes, that embarrassment happens to all of us). Then the distributor cap cracked, which itself was not as upsetting as the \$29 charged for a new one. After some checking around, we returned the solid gold distributor cap and bought another from an imported car parts dealer for just over \$5 . . . and even the Deutsche Mark can't excuse that price difference.

These are the many little hassles we uncovered, and they were no real financial burden, thanks to Audi's 1-year or unlimited-mileage warranty. Also covered, but a continuing problem, have been the 5000's brakes. Those familiar with the 100LS's faults will remember that car's biggest hassle was its inboard front discs which suffered from overheating and very short pad life. It's warped front discs that have us frustrated with the 5000 and, in all fairness, it doesn't seem to be a generic problem. In our case we first noted a pulsation in the brake pedal after the car's first few thousand miles and at 9639 miles had Bill Van Porsche Audi in Garden Grove, California check the problem. The discs were warped and had to be resurfaced, but within a few thousand miles the same problem returned, and at just below 14,000 miles the discs had to be trued again. Once more the fix lasted only a few thousand miles, and this time the rotors had to be replaced. But with more than 3000 miles on this new set, everything seems fine—so far.

After we topped 20,000 miles the first problem that could have potentially left us stranded on a dark freeway appeared when the temperature gauge began to read above normal. We had it checked at the 22,500-mile service and the dealer had to replace the leaking radiator, along with the thermal switch that controls electric fan operation.

As we mentioned before, all this work was done under warranty and at no cost to us, but there was some maintenance we had to pay for. The 1000-mile service set us back a total of \$7.69 for materials, as the labor is free on this one. At the 7500-mile service, we had a variety of small problems treated, the first rotor resurfacing and an oil and filter change, the whole routine costing \$28. All this was building up to a really major tune-up, the 15,000-mile service, which the Feature Editor had done at Tom McGann Imports in Middleton, Wisconsin, while on a trip to the midwest for Christmas. Labor came to \$65, while parts and oil added \$30; the total, with tax, was \$99. At 22,500 miles came the last maintenance stop of this test and a mere \$12 for oil and oil filter change. The point to be made here is that while this isn't exactly the inexpensive sort of upkeep you might expect from an American car, it is quite a bit less than we would have expected from an imported luxury car, especially one from Germany.

We've basically discussed problems to this point, and that's really somewhat unfair, because we've enjoyed the 5000 tremendously. A few samples of notes from the car's record book read: "Very impressive. Nice total package resulting in a very driveable and enjoyable car." "The steering is power assisted and it feels great." "The engine, unlike the 100 series, is smooth, quiet . . . good power." The comments go on in that manner, with drivers who experienced the car on long trips being particularly impressed. The all-time long-distance champion is John Lamm, who put 7000 miles on the Audi in 26 days. That makes him a most appropriate spokesman:

"First off, we were astounded by the amount of luggage we could fit in the trunk. I was traveling with my wife and two children (6-year-old boy and 8-year-old girl) and unlike so many trips when we start to pack the luggage and then decide what to


leave behind, this time the car consumed six suitcases of various sizes, my typewriter, briefcase and camera case.

"Just before leaving I swapped the standard Goodyear G800s for a set of European Uniroyal M&S tires from Euro-Tire. We were thankful for the change on several occasions, ranging from deep snow to heavy rain and the added traction and control more than made up for the tread's higher noise level. Impressions that last the most are such things as having so much control on slick roads traveling east from Albuquerque that I worried why I was passing everyone else so easily . . . excellent stability in sidewinds on the Texas plains; I didn't notice the wind was so strong until I saw campers swaying to and fro . . . doing 936 miles in one day without feeling the strain that 500 miles would be in many cars . . . cutting through 6- to 8-in. deep snow without so much as a pause. The Audi started on the first turn of the key every morning but one, despite a number of sub-zero nights. And that one time the temperature had fallen to -28 degrees Fahrenheit during the night. Then it started on the second turn, and with the engine mounts and other isolators brittle from the cold, I thought the Audi might rattle to pieces, but it survived nicely. At one point, the right rear door latch froze in the open position, thanks to a car wash earlier in the day, and forced me to tie the door shut with a rope. The only panic I experienced was having the red EGR light come on at 11:30 p.m. on a Friday in Oklahoma City and not realizing until I read the owner's manual that it was only a warning to take the car in for service.

"Such items as the stalk controls became second nature within a few hundred miles and the Audi has among the best such setups in the business. The heating/ventilation system is excellent, demisting the side windows quickly and pumping the car full of heat when we so badly needed it. With the exception of the door latch, I have absolutely no complaints with the 5000 and I have not always been its greatest fan; I've wondered about its durability. I'm now a three-quarter convert, waiting only for the 48,000-mile point before I give in completely."

The one subject that hasn't been mentioned at all, of course, is one of the most important, fuel economy. Before we pop the figure you should remember a few points: This is an honest 5-passenger luxury automobile with a giant trunk that is frequently loaded to capacity. At that, the 5000 averaged an impressive 22.0 mpg and needed 7 quarts of oil at times other than servicing. This, by the way, is for 24,734 miles as we subtracted the car's initial 391 miles. Fuel cost for that mileage was \$843 or 3.4¢ per mile.

We've included the usual chart listing the various costs incurred during the Audi's first 24,000 miles, but the overall cost per mile will be difficult to compare to previous long-term cars as we've refined the accounting system. Because of widely varying costs of license, tax(es) and insurance throughout the country, we've decided to leave these factors out of the final cost equation. So you're seeing "pure" figures here and will have to take those three added costs into consideration according to your locale.

The Audi is already well on its way to the ultimate 48,000-mile mark, and the line is forming for those who want to use it for summer vacation trips. Considering the rising cost and declining availability of fuel, it may be one of the best bets around. 

AUDI 5000	
Overall Costs & Cost per Mile for 24,000 Miles	
Delivered price, including dealer prep (\$90)	\$11,375
Gasoline (unleaded, average of 22.0 mpg)	843
Routine maintenance, by the book	141
Repairs and replacements (adjust brakes, distributor cap, speedometer adjustment, sunvisor clips)	42
Total expenditure	\$12,401
Resale value at end of test period, (est wholesale)	\$8850
Cost of driving 24,734 miles	\$3551
Overall cost per mile for 24,734 miles	14.4¢