Rally icon Carlos Sainz: “It’s a great experience be part of the edition Dakar project”

Ingolstadt, January 03, 2024 – The Audi Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* draws inspiration from a remarkable source: On the exterior, the lifted chassis and the optional decals of the special edition model, which is available in limited numbers throughout Europe, are reminiscent of the RS Q e-tron. It was designed for the Dakar Rally featuring an electric drive system and an energy converter. When evaluating the off-road capabilities of the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar, Carlos Sainz Senior, a two-time World Rally Champion and three-time Dakar winner, stands as one of the foremost experts. He is also a successful works driver in the Dakar Rally with the RS Q e-tron. Fermín Soneira Santos, head of the A- to C-segment electric model series, is equally qualified. Together they tested the off-road edition.

What do you both find fascinating about electric cars for off-road use?

Carlos Sainz: First of all, it’s a great privilege for me to be part of the evolution of motorsport. Throughout its involvement in the sport, Audi has consistently pushed boundaries with its new technologies. A few years ago, I wouldn’t have believed an electric drive could compete in rallying. I’m fascinated that I’m now able to win special stages in the RS Q e-tron and hopefully finish the Dakar at the front of the pack. I’m impressed by the overall advantages of electric drive systems, such as the ability to use the right propulsion in every driving situation without having to change gears. Of course, the sustainability of the electric drive system in off-road use also convinced me. It’s a great experience to be part of this project and to help advance the technology.

Fermín Soneira Santos: To me, driving an electric car is fascinating. It’s not just about the characteristics that are enjoyable, but also the emotions that a car like our top electric model, the Audi e-tron GT quattro*, inspires every day. When discussing the off-road capabilities of an electric car, we are talking about the torque, the specially adapted chassis, and the drive system. In the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar*, our customers will be able to experience what an electric drive system can achieve in off-road conditions. This model offers the best combination of reliability and performance off the beaten track.

What additional features does a model need to have to deserve the name edition Dakar?

Fermín Soneira Santos: This project was, of course, inspired by the RS Q e-tron and our participation in the Dakar Rally as well as Carlos. Both vehicles represent sustainable off-road driving. We aimed to transfer some of the RS Q e-tron's capabilities to a production model. First and foremost, this means ground clearance.

Compared to the Q8 e-tron*, we raised the chassis by 67 millimetres (*2.63 in*). The edition Dakar also comes with special off-road tires. The car has a power output of 300 kW and delivers 664 Nm of torque. In addition to the extensive range of standard equipment, there is also an optional special wrap. At first glance, it makes it clear that the edition Dakar was inspired by the styling of the RS Q e-tron.

How rugged is the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* compared to the standard model?

Fermín Soneira Santos: The increased ground clearance enables the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* to go where normal production vehicles can't. The extra 67 millimetres (*2.63 in*)can be used up to a speed of 80 km/h (*50 mph*). On highways, the body automatically lowers back down. Of course, the tread design of the tires also contributes to the car's off-road capabilities. Not only does it provide a better grip on loose surfaces such as gravel and snow, but it also absorbs some of the forces acting on the chassis. We also reinforced the suspension elements.

Carlos, what skills does a rally driver need to have to secure a top position in the Dakar?

Carlos Sainz: The Dakar is one of the toughest competitions in probably the most difficult terrain a rally driver can imagine. Also, the rally lasts two weeks, which is an unique duration in the sport, featuring extensive special stages. That's why you must be very well prepared, both physically and technically. Besides endurance, the Rally is all about teamwork. All the experience we gained in the Dakar was crucial in developing the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar*. The special model is perfect for people who also want to drive off the beaten track electrically.

What additional advantages can Audi customers look forward to when driving the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar*?

Fermín Soneira Santos: The Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* embodies the quintessential Audi DNA, characterized by a balance of solidity, control, connectivity. It relies entirely on the interplay of various components such as the chassis, steering, and drivetrain as well as the braking and control systems. The Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* is a premium C-segment model. Drivers can sense the quality of materials in the interior, along with the driving comfort and acoustics. And it is a quattro, which is particularly important for an off-road vehicle.

What synergies exist between Audi's participation in rallying and its production vehicles?

Fermín Soneira Santos: Our collaboration with Audi Sport is integral to developing production cars, drawing on the expertise gained. In addition, our colleagues test the technology we develop for production cars in extreme weather conditions.

**The collective fuel/electric power consumption and emissions values of all models named and available on the German market can be found in the list provided at the end of this text.*

So, our unreserved, close cooperation is a win-win situation for everyone involved. Both departments have an open collaboration, which benefits Audi Sport and production development.

Carlos, what are the off-road characteristics of the RS Q e-tron?
Carlos Sainz: First of all, I had never seen a drive system like this used at a rally. This groundbreaking experience has been incredibly exciting. Its electric drive concept instills reliability, a responsive driving feel, and, most importantly, confidence — vital attributes for Rally drivers. The car reacts the way I expect it to. After two years with the RS Q e-tron, we are very well prepared and are looking forward confidently to the next Dakar.

What is most important when driving off-road?
Carlos Sainz: It's important to judge the surface correctly. Familiarity with your vehicle and its available off-road features, as well as an understanding of your personal abilities and limits is key.

What do the RS Q e-tron and the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* have in common?
Fermín Soneira Santos: When it comes to the RS Q e-tron, we're talking about a car designed for extreme use, driven by motorsport professionals. The Q8 e-tron edition Dakar*, on the other hand, is a road-legal special edition, typically not driven by motorsport professionals. However, both share a spirit of adventure and a desire to explore and push limits. The electric drive systems of both models make them ideally suited for off-road driving.

What role do the tires of the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* play?
Carlos Sainz: On the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* the tires must work both in off-road and on-road settings. In my opinion, the off-road tires offered by Audi, available in addition to the standard tires, perfectly complement the potential of this special model.

Back to the rally: In your opinion, is a new era of electric power dawning or will combustion engines continue to dominate?
Carlos Sainz: We can already compete with the combustion engines. I am hopeful that the new Dakar regulations will enhance our competitiveness and provide more opportunities of achieving an overall victory. For example, we are penalized for short-term power surpluses, for example when the wheels have little or no contact with the ground. Just four years ago, most experts – including myself – doubted the viability of electric drive systems in endurance rallies. Our success with the RS Q e-tron shows that a manufacturer who focuses on sustainable drive technologies can also be successful in motorsport.

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How significant are the successes you've had at rallies with the RS Q e-tron for the brand's image and sales of electric production cars?
Fermín Soneira Santos: Success in motorsport has always been important for Audi and will continue to be so. The RS Q e-tron is the best platform to represent both our history and the future of the brand. Demonstrating the same pioneering spirit showcased in the 1980s with the introduction of the quattro to rallying, the RS Q e-tron at the Dakar underlines Audi's commitment to innovation. Regardless of the outcome in 2024, we have already made automotive history.

Is the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* the first in a series of electric and off-road ready special editions?
Fermín Soneira Santos: Our dealers express immense enthusiasm for this edition model. I sincerely hope that the Q8 e-tron edition Dakar* will be a success. If so, it will probably not be the last of its kind.

Short biographies

Carlos Sainz was born in Madrid, Spain, in 1962. He is a two-time World Rally Champion (1990 and 1992) and has finished on the podium in the World Rally Championship (WRC) 97 times. Sainz has won the Dakar Rally three times – in 2010, 2018, and 2020. Sainz drove the 2022 and 2023 Dakar Rally for Audi in the RS Q e-tron. In 2022, the Spaniard finished twelfth in the car class. In 2023, he dropped out after an accident on the ninth of 14 stages. In 2024, the father of Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz Junior will return to the Dakar in the further developed RS Q e-tron.

Fermín Soneira Santos was born in 1972 in Gijón, Spain. He studied at the University of Oviedo, Spain, and the University of Applied Sciences in Osnabrück, Germany, graduating in 1998 with a Master's degree in Mechanical and Automotive Engineering. He then began his career at AUDI AG in chassis development. In 2002, he moved to SEAT, where he spent the next twelve years in various technical development roles. In 2014, he returned to AUDI AG and took over product strategy and brand positioning for the luxury class models. Since September 2002, he has headed up the A- to C-segment electric model series.

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The Audi Group is one of the most successful manufacturers of automobiles and motorcycles in the premium and luxury segment. The brands Audi, Bentley, Lamborghini, and Ducati produce at 21 locations in 12 countries. Audi and its partners are present in more than 100 markets worldwide.

In 2022, the Audi Group delivered 1.61 million Audi vehicles, 15,174 Bentley vehicles, 9,233 Lamborghini vehicles, and 61,562 Ducati motorcycles to customers. In the 2022 fiscal year, AUDI Group achieved a total revenue of €61.8 billion and an operating profit of €7.6 billion. Worldwide, more than 87,000 people worked for the Audi Group in 2022, over 54,000 of them at AUDI AG in Germany. With its attractive brands, new models, innovative mobility offerings and groundbreaking services, the group is systematically pursuing its path toward becoming a provider of sustainable, individual, premium mobility.

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Fuel/electric power consumption and emissions values of the models named above:**

Audi Q8 e-tron edition Dakar
Combined electric power consumption in kWh/100 km (*62.1 mi*): 25.2–24.9 (WLTP);
combined CO_2 emissions in g/km (g/mi): 0 (0) (with summer tires, without roof rack)

Audi e-tron GT quattro
Combined electric power consumption in kWh/100 km (*62.1 mi*): 21.6–19.6;
combined CO2 emissions in g/km (g/mi): 0

Audi Q8 e-tron
Combined electric power consumption in kWh/100 km (*62.1 mi*): 24.4–19.5;
combined CO2 emissions in g/km (g/mi): 0

***The indicated consumption and emissions values were determined according to the legally specified measuring methods. The WLTP test cycle completely replaced the NEDC on January 1, 2022, which means that no NEDC figures are available for vehicles with new type approvals from after this date.*

The figures do not refer to a single, specific vehicle and are not part of the offering but are instead provided solely to allow comparisons of the different vehicle types. Additional equipment and accessories (add-on parts, different tire formats, etc.) may change relevant vehicle parameters, such as weight, rolling resistance and aerodynamics, and, in conjunction with weather and traffic conditions and individual driving style, may affect fuel consumption, electrical power consumption, CO_2 emissions and the performance figures for the vehicle.

Due to the more realistic test conditions, the consumption and CO_2 emission values measured are in many cases higher than the values measured according to the NEDC. This may result in corresponding changes in vehicle taxation since September 1, 2018. Additional information about the differences between WLTP and NEDC is available at www.audi.de/wltp

Further information on official fuel consumption figures and the official specific CO_2 emissions of new passenger cars can be found in the "Guide on the fuel economy, CO_2 emissions and power consumption of all new passenger car models", which is available free of charge at all sales dealerships and from DAT Deutsche Automobil Treuhand GmbH, Helmuth-Hirth-Str. 1, 73760 Ostfildern-Scharnhausen, Germany (www.dat.de).