



Extended-Use Report:

AUDI 5000 AT 48,000 MILES

*Not the least expensive car we've done,
but the most popular so far*

PHOTO BY WM. A. MOTTA

WE TOOK DELIVERY of our long-term test Audi 5000 in August 1978, intent on accumulating 48,000 miles as quickly as possible and here we are at that goal, less than 18 months later. In our first report on the car's progress (June 1979) at 24,000 miles, we explained that having given so much praise to the 5000 in our road test (December 1977) and naming it one of the Ten Best Cars for a Changed World (June 1978), it seemed a natural candidate for an extended-use report.

At the 24,000-mile or halfway point in our program, we reported that everyone on our staff was very impressed with the car's driving characteristics and that it had proven to be the most popular long-term test car we'd had around. Routine maintenance costs had been \$141 to that point, we had averaged 22.0 mpg for a total fuel bill of \$843, and repairs and replacement of parts had been a very low \$42. We also pointed out that

beginning with the Audi 5000 we were no longer taking into account license fees, taxes and insurance costs because those charges can vary widely from state to state (and even within a given state as far as insurance is concerned) and thus our cost-per-mile figure for the Audi (14.4¢ at 24,000 miles) would not be directly comparable with previous extended-use reports.

The 36,000-mile report appeared in the October 1979 issue of R&T, by which time our fuel consumption rate had improved to 22.4 mpg, routine maintenance charges (cumulative) were now \$284, and the cost of repairs amounted to a stingy \$50—admittedly, some brake work and replacement of the radiator which had taken place in the first 24,000 miles had been covered by Audi's 1-year, unlimited mileage warranty and the average driver would have been out of the warranty period when those problems occurred. With the routine maintenance and repair

charges prorated over the 36,000 miles, our cost per mile had now dropped to 12.7¢, and we concluded that update saying, "We are still quite impressed with the 5000 for its comfort on long jaunts, good handling characteristics, and the fact that it's a pleasure to drive." We went on to say that while we were looking forward to the final 12,000 miles of the test, we realized that when the test was completed we would sorely miss having the Audi to drive.

The final 12,000 miles didn't produce any great surprises, but we were pleased to note that our fuel economy continued to improve, finishing the test at 22.7 for the entire period with the last 12,000 miles registering 23.5 mpg. We attribute the improvement to a variety of factors, including more long-distance travel, the engine loosening up and drivers not using as heavy a throttle foot as was the pattern when the car was a novelty. Our cost for fuel didn't improve, as you can understand, and the last 12,000 miles we paid an average of \$1.02 per gallon for unleaded, some 20 percent more per gal. than we paid during the first 12,000 miles. It's not surprising, then, that our fuel cost per mile rose from 3.4¢ per mile for the first 24,000 miles to 3.7¢ for the next 12,000 miles and then leapt to 4.6¢ per mile during the last 12,000, resulting in an overall fuel cost per mile of 3.8¢.

Routine maintenance had cost a total of \$284 through the first 36,000 miles and we had two more services to perform to finish the test: the 37,500-mile service, which is minor and cost us \$17, and the 45,000-mile service. This is a major tuneup and additionally calls for a resetting of the EGR (\$91 labor), so the bill was \$153 which gave us a total of \$454 for by-the-book maintenance over the entire test period. For a German luxury car this is a reasonable figure, and for comparison purposes we spent \$280 for 48,000 miles of maintenance on our VW Rabbit (gasoline model—September 1976 R&T) and \$187 for the Chevrolet Chevette (April 1978). While it's certain that inflation has contributed with steadily increasing labor rates, it's also true that owners of more expensive cars pay higher prices for service.

The sum for repairs and replacements was \$950 and the bulk of that figure came during the last 12,000 miles of the test. Through 36,000 miles, we had spent only \$50 for windshield wiper blades, a distributor cap, sun visor clips, brake adjustment and speedometer calibration. We did have some other things that needed fixing, however, but they weren't taken care of until after that mileage. At 37,774 miles, we had the broken radio antenna replaced and the brakes were bled to minimize a spongy pedal, and the bill was \$81. At that same time the left vent wing was replaced but we were still within the 1-year warranty period so there was no charge for that job. At 38,145 miles, the left outside mirror was replaced (\$43 parts and \$12 labor). The sun visor clips which had broken a few thousand miles previously were out of stock and would have to be installed at a later date, the ventilation/air conditioning control panel was finally aligned properly, this being the third try, and our complaints of an annoying engine misfire and difficult cold starting were checked through the use of the diagnostic oscilloscope but nothing was reported as being wrong—there were no charges for these last tasks, so the bill was \$82 with tax.

Our next visit to the dealer was at 46,926 miles and we had the 45,000-mile major service performed. At the same time, we had the tires rotated and the front end realigned to try to cure a wobble in the steering resulting from uneven tire wear. We were disturbed that the dealer had not performed these two services earlier when the tires began to exhibit improper wear and we asked to have the steering checked. The sun visor clips were replaced, the right front door lock was replaced, the clock lightbulb was replaced (60¢ for the bulb, \$26 for labor!), the air conditioner was serviced and charged with Freon, another set of wiper blades was installed, a compression check was done on the cylinders and a variety of other small matters were attended to—the bill for the repairs and replacements was \$177. At 48,000 miles, we returned to the dealer because the cold starting difficulty had become worse, 2-3 upshifts and 3-2 downshifts occasionally caused graunching of the synchro rings and the front end still had a shimmy. Also, we were unhappy with the left outside mirror because since it had been replaced we had not

been able to adjust it far enough outward for proper vision and had asked to have it repaired previously without success. The cold start problem was solved with replacement of the auxiliary air regulator (\$57 parts and labor), the transmission was pronounced healthy, the shimmy was reported to be a result of tire runout that could only be solved by replacing the tires and the mirror was worked on again; there was no charge for these last items. When the car came back, the mirror was still not to our liking and while the cold starting was now all right, the engine still felt down on power.

One replacement occurred just after 48,000 miles—new shocks—but we included this expense because during the last few thousand miles of the test, the need for new shocks became apparent. Bilstein Corp of America in San Diego, California provided us with a set of shocks for the Audi—the list price for the front pair is \$198, for the rear \$158. We used those prices in our cost calculations, but the standard replacement shocks from Audi are \$158 for the front pair and \$64 for the rear set. Because the dealership where we had had the car serviced throughout the test was heavily booked with work, we took the car to another VW/Porsche/Audi dealer, one nearer to our offices but with whom we had not been happy in conducting our VW Rabbit test in 1976. We were equally annoyed and gratified that our faith (or lack thereof) had not been misplaced, because we took the car and all four shocks in for installation and also asked to have the malfunctioning trunk lock repaired. When we picked up the car, we were presented with a bill for \$100.85—broken down, the charges were \$25.85 to repair the trunk lock (\$25 of that was labor) and a whopping \$75 to install the rear shocks *only*. The service department representative claimed that we had not told them to install the front shocks too! We called the Porsche/Audi dealership that had been working on the car all along and were told that the charge for installing only the rear shocks would be \$39—a difference of \$36—while an independent alignment and brake shop quoted us a price of \$26—some \$49 cheaper. Live and learn. We had the front shocks installed at the independent shop, and the front end aligned, for \$96 total. The new Bilstein shocks cured the front end dive we had been experiencing, as well as doing away with a sharp thump over dips—the old shocks were bottoming—but the ride was smooth and well controlled. All in all, the new shocks were a necessary and worthwhile investment.

Conclusion

IT MAY well be that overall the Audi 5000 has been our most successful long-term test car project. We accumulated mileage at a blistering pace, had a constant list of drivers anxious to use the car, and had few problems that were not minor. Everyone on our staff still looks forward to driving the Audi, particularly when it comes to carrying four or five adults or a family with children on trips, and it has lost little of its initial appeal as far as we're concerned. And while it has not been the least expensive car we've tested for 48,000 miles, it has returned the most value—it's been the most comfortable, has been relatively trouble free, and has delivered very good fuel economy relative to its size and carrying capacity. After living with it for more than 48,000 miles, we don't have any qualms in reaffirming our praise of the Audi 5000 as one of the Ten Best Cars for a Changed World.

AUDI 5000 Overall Costs & Cost per Mile for 48,000 Miles

Delivered price, including dealer prep (\$90).....	\$11,375
Gasoline (unleaded, average of 22.7 mpg)	1756
Routine maintenance, by the book	454
Repairs and replacements (see text)	950
Total expenditure	\$14,535
Resale value at end of test period (est wholesale)	7450
Cost of driving 48,000 miles	\$7085
Overall cost per mile for 48,000 miles	14.8¢