

This is the new Audi A2. Launched at 2019's Geneva Motor Show, its pioneering aluminium construction is many years ahead of its time.

All right, so I'm pulling your leg – although maybe not as much as you might think. The A2 was actually launched back in 1999, but its lightweight Audi Space Frame construction did break the mould – and you can learn more about that on page 87 of our Intelligence section.

In many ways, even 20 years later, the A2 remains ahead of more modern rivals. And with its concept car looks, it has achieved a cult status with those savvy enough to invest in one.

Inside, you sit quite high up, just as you would in a modern compact SUV such as the Audi Q2. Turning the key does make the A2 feel its age, though. The 1.4-litre 90PS turbodiesel engine in this 2004 model starts with a jolt that sends vibrations through the steering wheel and the pedals, in a manner utterly alien to anyone who has driven a modern, whisper-quiet Audi diesel engine. But it delivers an extraordinary 65.7mpg combined*, and its three-cylinder configuration exudes real character. As you build the revs and work your way through the precise-changing five-speed manual gearbox, the A2 feels alive (in a way that, perhaps, some modern cars don't).


As I turn on to the motorway, my mind wanders back to 1999: the Euro was launched, Manchester United won the treble, Pokémon cards were a very big thing, the Millennium Dome was completed, *The Matrix* was released, and we were all a bit worried about the

Keeping it light

The Audi A2 shares not only its birthday with the Millennium Dome, but also the use of pioneering lightweight construction materials

Y2K bug. On a personal level, my nephew was trying to take his first wobbly steps, lidded plastic cup in hand. Now he's just celebrated his 21st with a proper uni pub crawl.

As I snap out of my reverie, I find I'm dawdling in the middle lane of the motorway on a steep incline. I'm in a little car so I know I'll have to move into the slow lane, change down a gear and eventually pull out again to overtake a truck ahead. But I don't do any of that. I just press down on the accelerator and the A2 surges forwards in fifth gear, thanks in part to its brawny engine, but also due to its light, 895kg weight.

On B roads, the A2 is similarly impressive. The suspension may thump over the odd pot hole, but the chassis is nimble and the steering is direct and accurate. And the way the engine punches the car out of corners – it's almost like driving a GT hatchback. Twenty years on, the A2 remains seriously good. And I'm not pulling your leg about that.  ANGUS FRAZER



Time to **PARTY**
LIKE IT'S 1999
with a drive in the
iconic Audi A2



Photographer GREG PAJO

