

# Review: Audi TT's Virtual Cockpit is the future of dashboards

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There are good things and bad things (not really) about being a technology writer.

I get to see a lot of cool things, but when I have to send them back, I

realize there's a lot of cool stuff I'll never own.

A lot of times, if something is cool enough and affordable, I'm happy to buy one, but it's the nature of the business that I won't be able to afford everything.

This week, I was asked if I'd like to review the technology inside the 2016 Audi TT.

I leave the automotive reviews to my colleague Terry Box, but I'm always glad to be asked to review a new car's technology - especially when the car has features I've never seen before.

Getting to drive a car like the TT is quite a treat in a pure automotive sense, but it also pushes all my geek buttons.

Don't get me wrong - I love my Honda Fit, but even with the built-in navigation package, it's not exactly the Starship Enterprise.

I sprang for as much technology as Honda offered in 2009, but as I drove the TT, it was painfully obvious technology has advanced at warp speed.

The 2016 TT has what's called a Virtual Cockpit. Instead of a traditional gauge cluster and center console screen for navigation and entertainment, Audi has moved the TT's screen behind the steering wheel.

The Virtual Cockpit is a 12.3-inch-wide LCD panel that displays the car's gauges and all infotainment. The dash has a resolution of 1440 x 540 pixels.

The system is run by a quad-core Tegra 3 Series processor from Nvidia

that generates 60 frames per second and performs 8 billion calculations per second.

The center console is gloriously bare. The climate controls are hidden inside the center of the three large round air vents on the dash.

## A CAR FOR THE DRIVER

The TT is a driver's car, and the interior is designed accordingly.

Every bit of information you'd want or need is presented clearly on the screen and accessible through steering wheel controls or a touchpad and [scroll wheel](#) on the console.

But while I loved the view and functionality from the driver's seat, my wife didn't exactly appreciate the radio station information not being where she could easily see it from the passenger seat.

## TWO MODES

The Virtual Cockpit has two viewing modes - classic view and infotainment view.

Classic view is a traditional two gauge setup, with tachometer on the left and speedometer on the right and a small window between them to show a variety of information, including maps, audio settings or the trip computers.

Infotainment mode shrinks the instrument dials and shifts the focus to information such as maps for navigation.

With the press of a button on the [steering wheel](#), the gauges move down and get smaller while the map grows to take up the entire width of the

screen. It's quite impressive.

I found myself using infotainment view almost exclusively - a 12-inch-wide navigation map is hard to resist.

## TOUCH INPUT

The TT's center console has a large knob and surrounding buttons for interacting with the infotainment system.

The knob is a four-position joystick with scroll wheel. The surface of the knob is a touchpad for pinching and zooming. The touchpad is also used for scrolling around the map and for handwriting recognition.

When you need to enter information, such as an address, you can draw the words one letter at a time with your finger. The system was deadly accurate at recognizing my written input. I found it much better than trying to scroll around some tiny onscreen keyboard.

## MAPS AND NAVIGATION

The TT's navigation system uses Google map information, including Google Earth views overlaid on the navigation system.

When you're zoomed in all the way on a Google Earth view, you can click to zoom one more time and you'll be taken into Google street view, which you can scroll around with the touchpad. The street view only works when the car is parked.

The maps overlay real traffic data from SiriusXM.

## AUDIO

The TT's audio system has the usual sources, including AM/FM/SiriusXM, along with a CD player, two SD card slots, a USB port, Bluetooth streaming from your phone and a built-in 10 gigabytes of storage for your music. My car was equipped with a 12-speaker Bang & Olufsen sound system with 680 watts featuring 5.1 surround sound and a 14-channel amplifier.

## SMARTPHONE CONNECT

You can connect your phone to the TT by Bluetooth or USB cable. I was able to make and receive calls and see recent calls as well as my voicemail messages and contacts. Once the phone was paired, it never failed to reconnect.

I was also able to stream any of my phone's music sources, but I had to start the music on the phone. Once the music was started, artist and song information was displayed on the car's screen, and I could skip back or forward and start or stop the music.

## AUDI CONNECT

The TT has built-in 4G LTE for loading the maps and Audi Connect data. The LTE can also be used as a hot spot to keep passenger devices connected.

A service called Audi Connect brings screens full of news headlines, RSS feeds, Twitter feeds, more than 7,000 Web radio stations, local gas prices, and Google local search. I loved having all that information at my fingertips, but it also only works when you're parked (thankfully). I found myself getting distracted by all the choices. It is a good integration of car and computer.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Audi TT is as technologically advanced as any car I've driven. Just getting behind the wheel and turning the key made me smile. I believe dashboards like the Virtual Cockpit are going to be incorporated into more and more cars. I'll certainly be looking for more dashboard screen real estate when I shop for my next car.

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