

Safe As A Bank

A sea change is taking place in the market for the best and safest of security cars due to heightened requirements in the Middle East, while the traditional European outlets report lesser demand. Vehicles like this certainly don't come cheap, but against human life they're a bargain.

Only a select few feel the need to use an elite security vehicle, and the facilities are as daunting as they are impressive. It's a world away from shaven-headed, overweight security men ferrying so-called VIPs around the night spots of Paris, London and New York. It's not for the movie world's red carpet contingent, rather for taking heads of state to summits in Europe or VIPs from Andrews Air Force Base into town in Washington DC. Only a handful of auto manufacturers make top-quality security cars, and Audi reckons its A8 Security leads the field by the most considerable distance. "It's the highest in the club for security. Perhaps an Obama car might have more, but that's it," says Ingolstadt-based Fritz Pakleppa, sales manager Audi Security Cars International. "It's the only security vehicle with four-wheel drive in the Quattro." Main markets for Audi security cars have traditionally been Spain and Italy. With terrorism less of a concern in Spain these days demand is lessened. Italy still has plenty of requirements; a cursory glance at the longevity of tenure of judges and top police in the country bears testimony to this. But Pakleppa says current events are heightening demand in the Middle East. "Tragic events in Paris last year changed things and have brought about more inquiries from Europe again. But we are seeing much more interest from the Middle East plus a lot of inquiries from northern Africa." Pakleppa declined to name specific countries. The company manufactures each order entirely under its own supervision in a partnership between the Neckarsulm plant in Germany and a secure, top-secret factory.

The car will satisfy the criteria of the class VR 9 ballistic protection standard, currently the most stringent requirements for civilian high-security sedans.

The safety cell of the new Audi A8 L Security will integrate extremely resistant materials—aramide fabric, special aluminium alloys and a hot-formed steel armor that offers even more protection despite its lower weight.

Standard security features of the luxury sedan include an armoured communication box in the luggage compartment, an intercom for communication with the outside world and selective door unlocking. Upon request, Audi can deliver solutions such as its patented emergency exit system, a fire extinguishing system and an emergency fresh air system.

These emergency service options are a treat, particularly blowing out the doors if you're in strife. It's simply a case of pulling a handle and they go flying so the occupants can get out. The fresh air system will supply 10 minutes of air for four people in an emergency. The car also boasts a monitoring system whereby, if it's in convoy, it can read what vehicles in front are doing. Pakleppa says most Audi Security Cars are used in convoy so this is a vital function if, for example, the car at the front is "knocked out."

Gulf car owners like their personal touches and this applies to security vehicles the same as any cars. “It would be more luxury items, colour trims, wood trims and the like for the Gulf,” says Pakleppa. “Most of our vehicles are black but in the Gulf they’d be likely to prefer white.” From the security aspect “there’s not much you could add.”

The Audi A8 L Security quattro drive makes it the only luxury sedan with an all-wheel drive system that is offered directly from the manufacturer as an armoured high-security vehicle. Thanks to the high share of aluminium in the body, the vehicle’s weight is relatively low. Nonetheless, it can handle a maximum payload of 600kg, which is the best figure in the competitive field.

Pakleppa says the new Audi vehicle weighs in at 3650kg “while the others are pushing four tonnes.” That means you can lug plenty of serious weaponry without hindering performance.

Two engines are available for the high-security sedan. The 4.0 TFSI, a biturbo V8, has a power output of 435hp and produces 600Nm of torque. The naturally aspirated W 12 FSI offers 500hp and 625Nm. Its torque performance is strong, and its top speed is electronically governed to 210km/h—a limit set in consideration of the tyres that possess exceptional emergency flat-running properties. The entire chassis and the quattro permanent all-wheel drive are specifically designed to meet the high security requirements.

It usually takes six months for a purchased vehicle to be ready. Audi has ‘spot cars’ at the ready for immediate use, although there might be a few compromises by the buyer. Orders are now being accepted for the updated Audi A8 L Security. Delivery is scheduled to begin in spring this year. One will go for roughly \$700,000-plus.

Security vehicles are lifesavers for sure but over the years they can be beasts of burden for those behind the wheel due to their weight.

Pakleppa: “The Audi A8 L Security is a potent combination of security and luxury. And it really does drive like a normal car. That’s the highest praise that can be given to such a vehicle.”

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