

Another Masterpiece from Viernheim

Busch 2002 Audi A4 Avant 3.0 Quattro in 1:87 scale

What a difference a decade makes. In 1991, Audi of America, Inc. posted its worst year ever with only 12,283 sales. The controversy surrounding the Audi 5000 nearly meant the end of the Audi brand in North America. Fast-forward to 2001, when Audi had its all-time best sales year. The company sold 83,283 cars in the United States. Worldwide sales totaled 776,134 cars. Volkswagen's upscale subsidiary has come a long way since the dark days. Today, the United States is Audi's second-largest market.

One of the key ingredients to Audi's comeback is the A4 series, which first appeared in America in 1996. Except for the TT sports car, the A4 is the smallest Audi sold in the U.S. In 2001, Audi brought a brand-new A4 sedan to the North American market. A little larger and equipped with a more powerful 3.0 liter V6 engine, the new A4 is already setting new sales records. With its sleeker styling and new continuously-variable automatic transmission, it has made *Car & Driver* magazine's "Ten Best" list for 2002 and has received excellent reviews in the motoring press.

Now the A4 family includes a station wagon. The new A4 Avant made its debut at last September at the Frankfurt International Auto Show (IAA) and is now becoming available at American Audi dealers. While there is quite an array of powertrains offered in Germany, the U.S. will see only the Quattro AWD version with either a turbocharged 1.8-liter inline four or the 3.0-liter V6. Since the new CVT is not offered for the AWD configuration, American buyers must choose between manual and Tiptronic automatic transmissions. In any event, the A4 Avant will be a new player in the growing crossover vehicle segment. Although it doesn't have the increased ground clearance or aggressive lower body cladding of the Allroad Quattro, it is priced thousands of dollars less and quite well-suited to most of the demands that would actually be placed on the larger car.



The 2002 A4 Avant is just now beginning to appear at Audi dealerships in North America. Photograph: Audi AG

As part of the new model rollout, Audi commissioned Busch Automodelle to produce a model of the A4 Avant 3.0 Quattro. The show model was supplied in a specially printed plastic display case and Audi packaging. In addition to sales at the show, the Busch model is sold through Audi dealers. Audi offers a nice selection of 1:87 scale models of their vehicles in Germany, but for some reason, they are not sold in the United States. Fortunately for North American fans, Busch added the Avant to its regular product line in 2002. The model will be offered in two trim levels: No. 49250 is the standard model; No. 49255 is the deluxe CMD version.

The new A4 Avant model is just now beginning to ship to distributors, but I had the good luck to obtain one of the dealer versions in Crystal Blue metallic. While it differs in some details from the products that will soon be available from your favorite hobby retailer, it is basically the same model. I'll mention the differences later.

In recent years, Busch has been setting new standards in both product quality and detailing. It seems the company sets new benchmarks with every new release. The A4 Avant is one of these new generation models and boasts a wealth of detail.

As you would expect from a model developed for promotional use by the prototype's manufacturer, the Busch model scales out as perfectly as I can measure. The Busch craftsmen had access to Audi design files during tooling design and the finished product was approved by Audi headquarters in Ingolstadt. The model is very well molded, with sharp details that stand up even under 6X magnification.

The car's exterior does an excellent job of capturing delicate detail. The B- and C-pillars are molded onto the plastic "glass" insert and then printed in matte black. This way, Busch avoids the clunky, too-thick cross sections found on many other models. The separately applied roof rails fair perfectly into the roof's complex curvature without a space anywhere. The grille is matte black with a chrome surround both above and below the bumper. The Audi 4-ring logo is also chrome plated. The fog lights below the front bumper also receive a carefully-aimed dab of chrome.



Busch Automodelle's new A4 Avant is a world-class model with a wealth of detail. This is the deluxe CMD version in Merlot Red. Photograph: Busch Automodelle.

One nice touch is the way Busch gives their metallic finishes a coat of lacquer. This not only gives the model a more realistic appearance under bright lights, it kills the dust-attracting static charge found on uncoated plastic surfaces.

There are other details worthy of special mention. Like most modern cars, the A4's headlights are actually a group of lights behind a clear fairing. Continuing the tradition they began with their 2000 Mercedes-Benz C-Class model, Busch is reproducing the "look" of a real headlight. First, they carefully mold the back of the headlight insert. Then they add a contoured chrome plated piece behind the lens. This provides an ultra-realistic appearance.

The wheels are beautiful. They are see-through reproductions of the 5-spoke optional sport wheels found on the real A4. But Busch goes a step beyond, carefully designing the wheel molding to simulate a brake disk behind the wheel.

Other touches include a delicate Audi logo and “A4” designation printed on the rear door. The high-mounted brake light is printed in red. The exhaust pipe tips are separate chromed pieces.

The interior is world-class. Begin by saying the seats are nicely molded and then get into one of the best-detailed interiors on a 1:87 scale model vehicle. Audi offers a variety of optional steering wheels to its German customers. The Busch model has a three-spoke sports version with a chrome Audi logo in the center. The top of the instrument panel is a separate piece, molded in a different color than the rest of the interior. There is also a free-standing rearview mirror with a chrome face and black back.

Other than the metallic finish, all the features I have described will be found on the standard model. But now, Busch offers a step up.

At the Nürnberg Toy Fair, Busch Automodelle announced a new premium line of vehicle models. Called the CMD line, the initials stand for *Chrome, Metallic and Detail*. CMD models will have extra chrome plating where appropriate, lacquer-coated metallic finishes and extra detailing. For the Audi A4 Avant model, the CMD version adds:

- Chrome roof rails instead of black.
- Black surround printing on the windshield and backlite.
- Silver printing of back-up lights in the taillight lens
- Front and rear license plates printed in three colors.

That last item is the only drawback to an otherwise outstanding model. The tags are German. While it is a nice detail for German collectors, it will be a problem for most North American fans. Since the license plates are printed and probably lie underneath the protective lacquer coating, removing them may present difficulties. I wish Busch had stayed with their old method of printing a variety of license plates on the bottom of the package insert. Then we might have even had American plates.

That is the one and only complaint I have about this model. And, to be honest, it doesn't even apply in Busch's home market.

Busch offers the standard model in Canvas Beige or Avocado Green. Before you think of that tacky shade so popular in the early 1970s, let me tell you the Audi green is a very nice, deep color. To avoid confusion, Audi of America wisely chooses to call their shade Goodwood Green. The CMD version comes in either Merlot Red or Ming Blue, both with the lacquered metallic finish. All of these are prototypical colors offered by Audi on the full-size A4 Avant.

A couple of notes: First, if you wish to disassemble the model, *gently* remove the red taillight inserts. They lock the undercarriage and interior in place. Once freed, the inserts have a tendency to head for parts unknown, like the nearest carpet, so be very careful. The interior is attached to the chassis by a couple of delicate pins, so be careful to gently pry it off. Second, *never* try to pry the wheel off by twisting on the tire. You will break it. The wheel spokes are the only things attaching the rim to the hub and they are very delicate.

According to Edmunds, a real Audi like mine would go for about \$35,235.00 in the U.S. This includes the optional metallic paint, 5-spoke wheels, xenon headlights and destination charges. Thanks to a strong dollar, that's only slightly higher than the German price. What a shame it doesn't work that way in the model world. The CMD version from Walthers is \$11.99. In Germany, the suggested retail price is €9.99 or about \$8.82 at the current exchange rate. However, the CMD version is still competitively priced and the standard model at just \$7.99, a real bargain, especially considering all the value you get.

I am quite confident that, whichever version you choose, the new Busch Audi A4 Avant model will happily embarrass most of the other unaltered models in your collection or on your layout. This model is easy to recommend to collectors of modern vehicles, Audi fans or model railroaders who model the modern era.

Bill Cawthon

Busch No. 49250 - 2002 Audi A4 Avant 3.0 Quattro (standard) in Canvas Beige and Avocado Green. Suggested retail price (Walthers Online) \$7.99

Busch No. 49255 - 2002 Audi A4 Avant 3.0 Quattro (CMD) in Merlot Red or Ming Blue. Suggested Retail price (Walthers Online) \$11.99



Manufactured by:

Busch Automodelle, D-68502, Viernheim, Germany

Imported and distributed by:

E-R Model Importers, Ltd., 1000 South Main St., Newark, New York 14513

Wm. K. Walthers, Inc. 5601 West Florist Ave., Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53218



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