



Tested: Coilovers

Words: Dav Photos: Various



THE TEST

We wanted to find out how the different kits performed during every day driving, so we set out a road route, with lots of variations in surface, including smooth fast A roads, bumpy B roads, town driving and plenty of roundabouts.

Most people will fit a set of alloys with low profile tyres, so for realistic results, we borrowed the 19in rims off our TT and fitted them to our test Audi A3. We drove the car on standard suspension to get a benchmark, before the first set of coilovers were fitted. We then drove the 30-mile route with the coilovers wound down to a medium height of -40mm.

The units with adjustable dampers were tested a further two times with the dampers set to their hardest and softest settings. We also examined the units off the car to see how they would hold up in the real world.

Above The coilovers were put through their paces on our varied test route

Above left Dav spent a week testing the coilovers on the road

One of the easiest ways to improve the looks and handling of your car is to lower it on a set of coilovers, but which is the best kit for road driving?

Standard cars tend to ride quite high, so the first step for most of us is to lower it. This not only improves the handling, but looks much better, and the compact spring/damper design of coilover suspension allows larger wheels to be fitted.

Generally, coilovers allow a car to be lowered from around 30 – 70mm according to personal preferences. Some also have adjustable dampers, to firm up, or soften the ride.

While some people are willing to sacrifice comfort and like it slammed

to the deck, many want a medium setup that lowers the car, while maintaining maximum driveability.

Whichever camp you're in, it pays to know how a kit feels before you shell out your hard-earned. So we've got together four popular kits to see how they fared on the road.

The kits varied, from a budget unit with non-adjustable dampers, to higher end kits with full adjustability. To make things more interesting, we did the test blind, so each time Dav took the car for a drive, he didn't know which set had been fitted.

Eibach

Adjustability 30-70mm »



£678

Good points

Well made, very sporty feel, sharpened up the front end of the car

Bad points

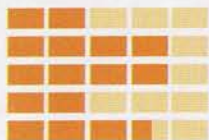
Bit too firm for every day driving, non-adjustable dampers



Eibach are a major player in the suspension market and supply springs and dampers to many other companies. The Pro Street S is their top line kit, which has fixed rate dampers. The ride height can be adjusted by up to 70mm, and they're TUV approved.

The Pro Street S is a quality unit with a chrome finish. The most performance focused kit tested, both spring and damper felt very firm. Around town and on bumpy B roads they were the most uncomfortable set here and quickly became tiring to drive normally. But as soon as you put your foot down, they came into their own. The steering felt much sharper and there was far less body roll than the others. Under hard cornering and chucking it into roundabouts, they performed really well. They were at their best on smooth sweeping A roads although the payoff for great handling, is a very stiff ride. Would be my choice for a trackday or weekend toy.

Comfort
Handling
Quality
Adjustability
Value



"The Eibachs were at their best on smooth, sweeping A roads"



Coilover Test



V-Maxx

Adjustability 35-70mm »



£299

Good points

Bargain price, can be lowered 70mm, sporty handling

Bad points

Not as high quality as others, very firm ride



V-Maxx is a Dutch manufactured kit that's relatively new to the UK. It's fully TUV approved and can be height adjusted by up to 70mm. The dampers are fixed and the struts are galvanized steel for durability.

The V-Maxx kit didn't feel as well made as the other kits tested and fitted very close to the wheel. But like all the kits it was easy enough to adjust for height. Out on the road, both the springs and dampers immediately felt very firm, although not as full-on as the Eibachs. Around town and on bumpy B roads this led to an uncomfortable ride, but on a smoother A road they felt much more at home. There was very little body roll; the V-Maxx did the job at a fantastic price. The car felt planted on faster roundabouts, although, like the Eibachs, the dampers are non-adjustable, but we wouldn't expect that at this price and as such they represent excellent value for money.



Comfort
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Quality
Adjustability
Value



"Very little body roll; the V-Maxx did the job at a fantastic price"



Koni

Adjustability 30-60mm »



£834

Good points

Great overall feel, responsive front end, well made, excellent fit

Bad points

Most expensive kit on test, rear shock don't adjust on the car

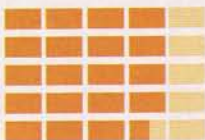


The Koni units have on-car adjustable damping at the front, while the rears need to be removed to adjust for rebound. They come in a high quality chrome finish, are TUV approved and the suspension can be lowered by up to 60mm.

The Konis looked great in chrome and feel like they'll last a long time. With the dampers on medium setting, the car cornered superbly, with reduced body roll, and the front end felt more precise than standard. Badly rutted B roads could unsettle the car, but generally they were nicely balanced, and around town they coped well with potholes. With the dampers adjusted to soft the car felt a lot more comfortable, although the pay off was more roll and the front wheel could catch the arch under hard cornering. On their hardest setting, they were very firm around town and on bumpy B roads, but they were noticeably more sporty on fast smooth A roads. An excellent all rounder.



Comfort
Handling
Quality
Adjustability
Value



"With the dampers on medium setting, the car cornered superbly"



Coilover Test



Spax RSX

Adjustability 35-65mm



£646

Good points

Full on-car adjustability for dampers, handled great, well made

Bad points

Tricky to get the right balance of comfort/performance



The RSXs can be adjusted on the car for damping on both front and rear. They come in a powder coated finish and the height can be adjusted by up to 65mm. They're also made in the UK and are TUV approved.

The first run was with the dampers at a medium setting. Of all the sets, they felt most like OE suspension, with a forgiving ride and soft damping. On faster roads this softer setting meant more body roll through the corners and the offside front wheel touched the inner arch when hitting roundabouts at 40mph. On their softest setting, the dampers absorbed the rebound for comfort, but the car bounced too much. On their hardest setting the back end especially felt very firm and skitted over bumps. Overall, the RSXs were easy to adjust and generally performed very well.



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"The RSXs were easy to adjust and generally performed very well"





■ HOW LOW?

Some of these coilovers will go as low as 70mm. But although it'll make your car look ace, it'll have implications for the driveability. For starters with the platforms wound right down, the car will be running very close to the bumpstops. This means there will be little suspension travel, resulting in a very harsh ride. You can see this on very low cars when the back end seems to skit over bumps, almost as if it has solid suspension. The other factor is the handling. With the whole geometry altered, the car will behave very differently, leading to uneven tyre wear even and fouling of other suspension components. If you go for looks over performance, this is fine, but if you want to drive the car hard, you'll need to compromise ride height for driveability.



■ CONCLUSION

After giving all four kits a proper workout, it's clear they all have plus points. At £299 the V-Maxx units are our best value buy and offer a budget option for lowering your car. For me they were too uncomfortable for day-to-day driving, but if you don't mind a firm ride, and want to drop your car by up to 70mm, they're definitely worth considering.

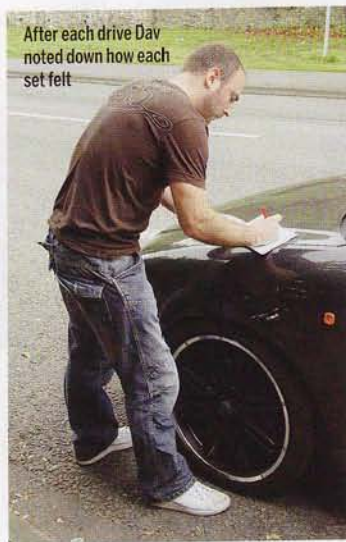
The Eibachs are a quality piece of kit, which look like they'll last for years. They fitted easily, although with larger wheels, you may need a slim spacer to clear the inside of the wheel. On the road they felt very firm and sporty and for fast, smooth road driving, they handled really well. However, the springs are quite firm and with non-adjustable dampers, they could become tiring if you're not in the zone. But on a track, these would be my choice.

The two sets with adjustable dampers from Koni and Spax were definitely at an advantage from a comfort perspective. For everyday road driving, and on poor surfaces, they could be adjusted to a softer setting, but then firmed up if you fancied a blast. But for most of us, it'll be a case of finding a medium setting that we like and sticking with it. It was a very close call, but for me, with both units on a medium setting, the Konis just clinched it for overall feel. They provided the best balance between performance and comfort, which is what this test was all about. Having said that, the Spax units are £188 cheaper than the Konis, so they make a very tempting alternative, especially when you factor in the cost of getting them fitted. Thanks to everyone who took part in the test.

We lowered all the kits 40mm to make sure we got consistent results



After each drive Dav noted down how each set felt



■ FITTERS' CHOICE

Shane from local garage GCS fitted all the coilover kits for us and reckoned there was one clear favourite – the Konis. "They felt like quality kit and fitted really well, with plenty of space between the suspension strut and the wheel. They also felt nicest on the test drive."

■ CONTACTS

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