

Rising Star

Motor Madness



Ian Lamming drives Maserati's new SUV, the Levante

IT'S enough to turn you to crime. I want this car and if I can't have it I want the time-piece poking temptingly out of its gloriously swathed leather dashboard, or the embossed trident symbol on each of its headrests.

There are cars you need, there are cars you are given and there are cars you simply lust over – Maserati's new SUV, the Levante is the latter.

I've always been a massive fan of the Italian luxury brand, since the first time I drove a 3200. To me Aston Martins are too ordinary, Ferraris too brash (listen to me talk, like I could afford either), but Maserati offers timeless beauty, charm and heritage – and the chance of ownership.

Three things stand out; actually make that four. Styling is stunning. Look at that face, those oriental eyes, those luscious lips, those shapely lines. Whoops. Sorry grandma; I mean those sleek lights, that aggressive grille, those shapely lines.

Secondly, it would not be a Maserati without an incredible sound. But how, from a diesel, I hear you cry. Yes, I know, it's hard to believe, but a cleverly mounted exhaust speaker tunes, refines and enhances the V6 diesel's aural delights to magnificent effect.

Detailing, the devil is definitely in the detailing,

is a veritable feast, from its 21in alloys and slatted inner grille (that closes automatically to improve aerodynamics or after the engine is switched off and has reached optimum cool down temperature) to its embossed leather, the plethora of trident emblems, the sheer quality of the cockpit. It's like a jewelled watch, which brings me back to clock in the dash. I love that clock, now where did I leave my screwdriver?

Fourthly, and I was surprised at this, is the fact I could afford a Levante on a monthly contract; in fact it is better value than an Audi Q5 I once contract hired. Where do I sign?

Pretty, undoubtedly. Sumptuous, most definitely. But does it perform? Oh yes, in every department.

The lusty diesel wangs out 275HP and 600Nm of silky smooth torque. Benchmark 60mph is reached in under seven seconds with a top speed of 144mph, yet the combined fuel consumption is just under 40mpg. That do ya?

The suspension is even more impressive with Skyhook electronic damping raising and lowering the whole body depending on speed and conditions.

Off road – yes we took it off-piste – is extremely impressive. It even has a hill descent control with which you can adjust the speed using a toggle switch on the steering wheel.

Porridge conditions are dealt with incredibly well with no hint of loss of traction as the clever mechanicals shift the power around to the wheels with the best grip. It's a proper off-roader.

On the road you can stick it in sport and use all that body control and performance to amazing effect.

Levante means 'rising' in Italian and it is certainly doing that on many levels. It has to be good, Levante is expected to account for half of Maserati sales and targets are closing on the 40,000 a year mark.

Days like this are what I live for and why I'm lucky enough to do what I do. Levante and the wonderful four door saloon we also drove, the Ghibli S, the sunny day, the North York Moors, the hospitality of Middleton Lodge at Middleton Tyas, where the launch is based, all combine to make this particular test day a seminal moment in a long motoring career. See, I don't need to turn to crime after all.

Maserati Levante
Engine: 3.0 diesel
Power: 275HP

Top speed: 144mph
Combined MPG: 39.2

Transmission: eight-speed auto
CO2 g/km: 189