

MOTORING



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Rumble in the urban jungle



THE FACTS

Maserati Levante Trofeo

Price: £125,370

Engine: 3,855cc, eight-cylinder, petrol

Power: 572bhp

Torque: 730Nm

Top speed: 187mph

0-62mph: 4.1secs

Economy: 17.7mpg combined

CO2: 320g/km

For: Style and performance

Against: Price compared with rivals

Sum Up: If you like your SUVs fast and want something different, try the Maserati

When I was a kid there wasn't anything in this more exciting than peering under the bonnet of a car and admiring its engine, wondering what all the shiny bits did.

There's very little point in doing that these days because all there is under the bonnet of modern cars is a slab of plastic covering the engine and a messy gaggle of pipes and hoses. Except in this Maserati Levante Trofeo.

Maserati's super SUV is powered by a 3.8-litre twin-turbo V8 engine that produces a mighty 572bhp and has a red crackle finish on its exposed valve covers. Why such flourish? Because the engine is made by Ferrari. In fact, it's the same motor that's fitted to Ferrari's Portofino and Roma models.

It's not exactly the same because the Levante has a 120-degree crankshaft which gives the Maserati a rumble like a Ford Mustang rather than the Ferraris' flat-plane scream.

I'm not a huge fan of super SUVs that weigh 2,170kg even if they can

do 187mph and 0-62mph in 4.1sec, but the Maserati matches these unreal world numbers with such a lot of character.

We tested the Maserati Ghibli hybrid recently and it had virtually no personality and could have been built by Kia – and probably would have been better if it was.

The Levante Trofeo, however, feels as special as a Maserati should even though there's nothing in the company's glorious racing past to which a powerful SUV can relate.

Our Trofeo looks mean with carbon fibre trim on its bumpers and mirror caps, but it's even better inside with top class materials and a superb finish. Somehow its round dials suit the personality of a Maserati better than digital screens for mph and rpm.

You get a traditional analogue clock as well. The Levante Trofeo is a rival to barnstorming 4x4s such as Porsche's Cayenne Turbo and Range Rover's Sport SVR and it feels at least as special inside as both of them.

Neither of these rivals have engines that can match the music generated

by the V8 in the Trofeo.

It doesn't matter what driving mode you've selected or whether you're starting the engine from hot or cold.

Drive is via an eight-speed automatic gearbox to all four wheels. Most of the torque goes to the rear, only shifting to the front when there's a traction issue.

The ride on the standard air springs is comfortable, the steering precise and the brakes effective, albeit with a rather soft pedal and a soggy feel.

That Ferrari engine will keep you entertained even if you're not driving quickly. At £125,370 the Maserati is not cheap, especially as it isn't as big inside as many of its rivals at that price.

Think of it as more Porsche Macan sized than Cayenne.

Which makes me wonder if the Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio isn't a better bet.

It too has a ding-dong engine, a tad over 500bhp and, more importantly, a very sexy badge behind which is a glorious motor racing past.

As great, if not greater, than Maserati's.