

CLASSIC DRIVER

Bull Run

The following is an extract from Roberto Giordanelli's feature in Auto Italia magazine, Issue 111 2005. For access to the full feature, plus articles on the 2005 Frankfurt Motor Show, Ferrari Days at Spa-Francorchamps, a triple V12 Ferrari four-seater roadtest (612 Scaglietti, 456GT, 412A), the second part of Peter Collins' story on Alfa Romeo's Tipo 33/3 sports racing car, and much more, see www.auto-italia.co.uk



Lamborghini watchers will know that 2005 is the 40th anniversary of the world's most beautiful car - the Lamborghini Miura. A normal celebration is simply not enough for this icon of icons so the 40th anniversary will span 2005 and 2006, because in autumn 1965 at the Turin Motor Show, the show-stopper on the Lamborghini stand was bereft of body. It was just a rolling chassis with a spectacular mid-mounted transverse V12.

Not only did it not have a bodyshell but no one had even been commissioned to design one. Nevertheless, the orders flooded in, so boss Ferruccio Lamborghini handed the design duty to Bertone. As soon as the Turin Show closed, Bertone got to work on his new commission. The head of design and brainchild of the Miura was an astonishingly young 22-year-old Marcello Gandini. After a winter of frantic work, the March 1966 Geneva Motor Show saw the presentation of the first real Miura and the immortality of Gandini.

Miura production ran from 1966-1973 and saw three main model types: P400, P400S and P400SV. We drove an example of each:

The P400

As you drop down into the seat of this 1967 car, you immediately inhale that Lamborghini smell. The sitting position is laughable but you quickly forget about it: the Miura's beautiful proportions mean compromises.

Ignition on. Wait for the fuel pump to settle down. Prime the 12 chokes with a couple of dabs on the right pedal (no choke is fitted to any Miura) and the 12 cylinders whoop and fall to a smooth idle. Keeping the bank of Webers in tune is not the nightmare that folklore would have you believe. Down the not-too-heavy clutch pedal, slot the metal-gated lever into the conventional position for first gear, and away we go.

Despite the low mileage the rear springs have suffered by supporting 60% of the P400's mass for nearly 40 years. Accelerative squat drags the tail even lower as the nose rises. But at lower speeds the ride is quiet and comfy. Roll is noticeable but the suspension element in the high-profile narrow tyres gives the P400 a fine steering and ride quality long gone in more modern machines.



The P400S

This very green Miura S is the famous 'Twiggy Car': the icon supermodel in the icon supercar; something yet to be bettered. Originally a 1968 white P400, like many Miuras this one has been upgraded. In this case a factory upgrade in 1970 from P400 to P400S. Then in 1990 the car was in a garage fire and was returned to the factory for another rebuild. 'S' upgrades include chrome window trim, electric windows, a switch pod in the roof lining and the 'S' badge. Under the skin an 'S' has a stiffer chassis and a more powerful motor. Visually, an 'S' is close to its predecessor, the P400, but for straightline speed an 'S' is up there with an SV.

The green car feels slightly more highly strung than the P400. The ride is more taut and there is busy-ness from the engine. The extra 20bhp comes at the top end by stretching the red-line to nearly 8000rpm. With revs comes power and speed. However, contact with your passenger is now by **SHOUTING**. If you want to be bad in any Miura you will need a **LOUD VOICE**.

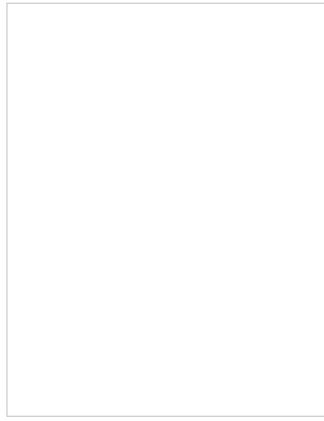
The P400 SV

This is a 1970 car totally rebuilt and upgraded to SV spec - and it's mine. The engine starts with an explosion of revs and just as quickly settles down to smooth tickover.

Minute changes to the seat angle and steering column make a big improvement to the sitting position. Despite the gearchange shaft passing in a straight line through the engine's sump and directly into the gearbox, the gearshift on any Miura requires effort. The clutch is surprisingly light for the period while the unassisted steering has perfect feel. It is a little low-geared for parking but the faster you go, the better it gets. With its much wider rubber, traction and grip are tenacious. Chassis communication with the driver is enormous, while the long-travel unassisted brakes do their job well enough.

What makes the SV so quick is its ability to carry far more speed through a corner than a P400 or an 'S'. This Miura SV is rock steady at huge speeds and the top-end power rush is accompanied by a crescendo of noise. In fifth gear, 180mph is all yours - something to irritate the Health and Safety Police.





*Words by Roberto Giordanelli and pictures
courtesy of Michael Ward, and Auto Italia
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