
Make way for the bad guy

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South Beach Miami. A roaring, growling sound cuts the spring-like air, then an open, brilliant white sports car enters Ocean Drive. Sunglasses-wearing bikini-girls turn and stare, surfers pretend to be uninterested, a pelican lands on the sea. Another day in Miami but a new one for me in Lamborghini's latest Gallardo Spyder.



The backdrop seems familiar. Don Johnson in a pastel-coloured suit getting out of a Ferrari in 'Miami Vice', Al Pacino in 'Scarface'. The Miami skyline is familiar to all of us. But it's 22 years on from 1984 and Johnson would approve of the new open Italian supercar to replace his Daytona Spyder. Instead of fighting the winter's cold in Germany I've been sent to drive the newest Lamborghini from Miami to the Florida Keys.



It's a simple formula - a short stab on the pedal means blasting acceleration, roaring exhaust note and blurred Art Deco frontage. If I ever had a reserved nature and upbringing it's all gone - I now feel strangely animal. The sun burns my face and arms white from a North European winter, behind my black sunglasses my eyes widen - the car is like having a tiger shark in the bath with you, it fun to play with but it might bite your toes off. I can see my car's profile reflected in the windows of the passing shops, and a passing Hummer H2 has its bass set *low* - it's time for me to take the ride.



The Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder was introduced last autumn at the IAA in Frankfurt as the fourth model in the AUDI-owned company's portfolio. With its 10-cylinder mid-mounted motor producing 520 HP a maximum speed of 314 KM/H (195 mph) is achievable, and 100 KM/H (62 mph) from zero comes up in just 4.3 seconds. It's the set-up that will see service in the latest Gallardo coupés. The top can be dropped - when stationary please! - in 20 seconds by the simple push of a button, and tonsorial buffeting is reduced by a separate wind deflector.



Behind me: traffic lights, traffic jams, speed limits and the ever-sharp Sheriffs of South Beach and Downtown Miami. Before me: the endless bitumen of Homestead Miami Speedway under a burning sky. The black strips of rubber on the tarmac remind me of the thundering NASCAR racers and the sun is at its zenith. The red tacho needle is flickering on the rev-counter, I click the right paddle to engage first gear and depress the accelerator.



Counting, counting: ...twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four and pull the paddle forward again. The speedo snaps past 100 and my face, exposed with the roof down, is stretched as if by Botox. The engine is howling now and gear after gear follows, 200 KM/H comes and goes than hard on the brakes means a reverse of the process and I come to a halt.



With a fighting weight of 1500 kilos, excluding fuel and driver, the car is around 130 kilos more than the hardtop coupé. Without a roof some structural stability is lost, but you don't notice it and it feels as secure as solitary confinement in Sing Sing.



The driving experience revolves around the finely-developed combination of six-speed gearbox controlled by Lamborghini's E-gear sequential actuation. The permanent four-wheel-drive and carefully-weighted power steering is hidden from view but makes itself present soon enough. No Homeland Security Act can give more reassurance, and with the various electronics coming into play any wayward action from the tail is soon tamed.



When the white Gallardo Spyder leaves the race track the January sun is hanging deep red over the malls of suburbia. Driving back I push the car again and again, with glowing Brembo brakes and worn Pirelli P-Zeros it's taken two fill-ups at the pumps for the day's enjoyment but we're both purring like an alley cat feasting on finest salmon. On Highway One, direction Key West, I ignore the awkwardly placed speed limit and drive the V10 again into areas that could bring a long spell in the County Jail.



As I cross the first bridge between the Keys little else is on the highway. At one point a speed boat is planing on the foaming waves of the Atlantic, as if accompanying me on my journey south. The air is salty and warm, the roof still down. At Key West, the southernmost place on the North American mainland, it's night time.



Cuba is ninety miles away and my headlights illuminate the bridge ahead. I take my foot off the gas, slow down, coming to a halt in the middle of the bridge. The ocean lies below and behind me the car murmurs to itself on tickover. As Scarface would say "I want what's coming to me...the world...and everything in it." I return to the car and press the accelerator.

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