

CLASSIC DRIVER

Quattroporte on the Supercar Tour 2006



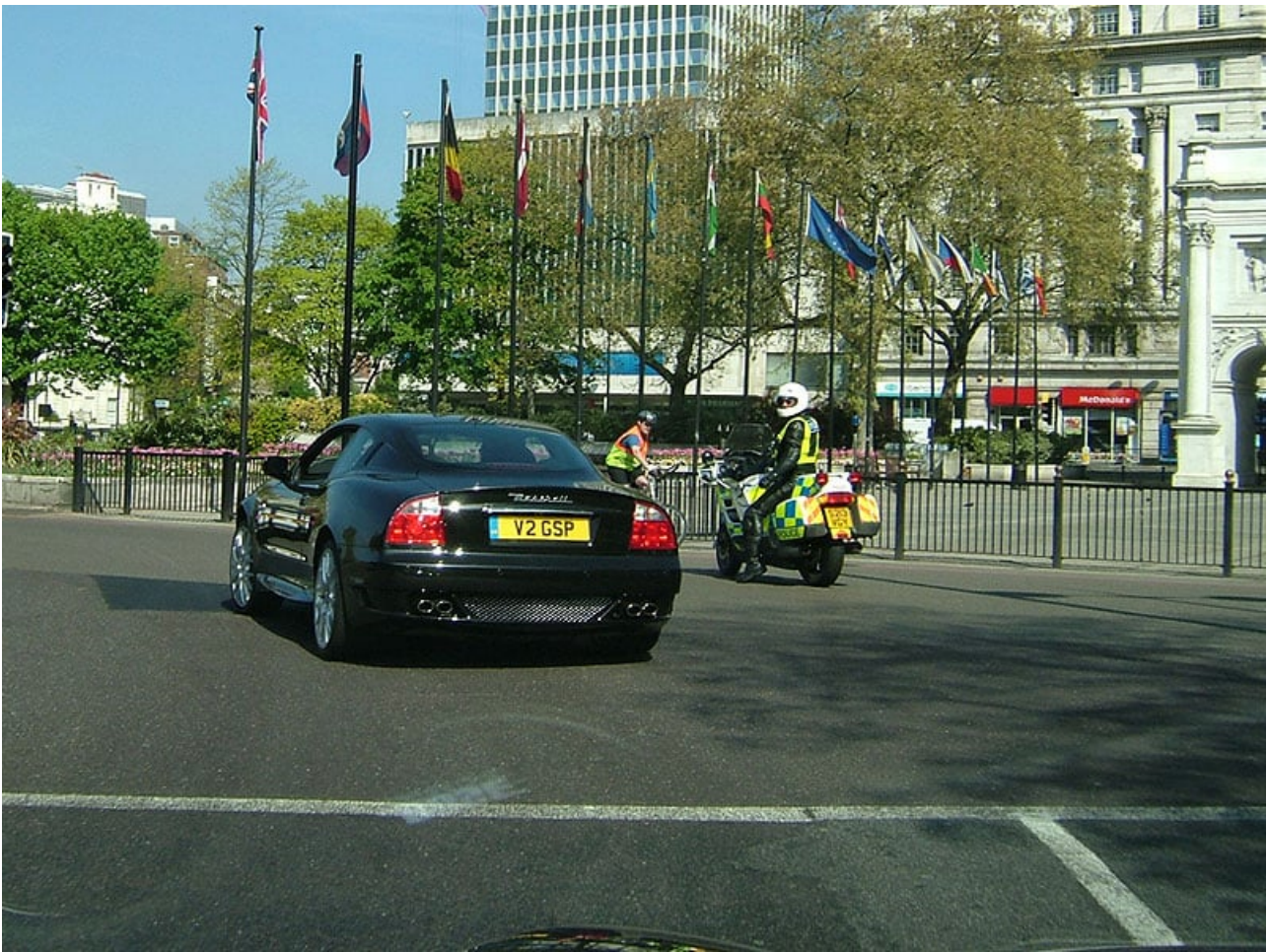
The racing's for road-based supercars, so why not celebrate that with a trip from one of their natural environments, London's Clubland, to another, the home of the British GP? On board Maserati's latest 171 mph luxury four-seater, Classic Driver entered the Tour.

The assembly point was St James's Square at 8.00am, where specially reserved parking spaces had been allotted to the 30 or so GTs participating in the event that was to transport the Tourist Trophy itself to Silverstone for the weekend's meeting. I'd driven the big car down in fully automatic mode - the car's default on start-up - and the various modifications and improvements the company has made to the DuoSelect (a 'manual' gearbox with ratios selected either via steering wheel paddles or automatically by the 'box itself) transmission became evident. In fact apart from the couple of laps of the GP circuit (don't worry, we'll come to that later...) I had the car in auto for pretty much the whole time.



Having breakfasted at the Royal Automobile Club, home to the Tourist Trophy for the rest of the year, the convoy of cars set off under a full police outrider escort that was to see us through all red lights and the capital's usual rush-hour traffic with impunity. The onlooking office workers, enjoying a cigarette or coffee break, had a memorable sight - only beaten by a giant mechanical elephant parading through the West End later that day and no, I'm not making that one up.







We were under strict instructions to keep in convoy, and maintain a steady speed escorted by the same motorcycle cops that perform diplomatic and royal duties. Driving an Italian supercar under police escort is becoming something of a habit (see the [Ferrari Enzo Tour](#) piece from 2005) and take it from me; given the choice, I wouldn't travel any other way.

The constabulary abandoned their charges at the first stop at Chalfont Park, safely outside London, and after a brief coffee stop the Tour continued, this time following Silverstone Circuit's own red Audi RS4 saloon. The next destination was Towcester horse-racing course, owned by Lord Hesketh of James Hunt grand prix fame. On a blazing late spring day, the cars assembled in front of the course's period buildings for a photo-call. Nearly everyone had made it (a tuned Ascari having a fit of the vapours en route) and the mood amongst the drivers was one of enthusiasm for the event as a whole.



Onwards to Silverstone, this time as a cavalcade following the Dodge Viper Pace Car carrying the Trophy into the circuit. The cars on the Tour were then shepherded into the collecting area for a couple of laps of the track before being marshalled into a designated parking area for the weekend.



Time to describe the Quattroporte Executive GT

It's a fabulous looking car and, with its exclusive badge and heritage, really stands out from the German alternatives. In fact until Aston Martin produce the Rapide (at double the price, with less interior room) I can't think of anything else to touch it. The Mercedes CLS is much smaller in the back (with a bigger boot) and, er, that's just about it. You never consider it a 'saloon' but trust me, the rear seat passengers have a lot of room and you never really notice the extra door handles at the back. Do remember however the rear-mounted transmission does take a lot of boot space.

The Executive GT model was announced last year and is designed to offer a slightly more luxurious take on the big sporting car. The chrome wire grilles at the front and side are a give-away, as are the special 19" wheels (normally chromed, ours were painted). Inside, rear seat passengers will enjoy the Comfort Pack with its combined heating, ventilation and electrically adjustable massage seats. There's also Alcantara on the headlining and retractable wood tables as standard in a rear compartment with its own climate control settings.



Up front, having settled into the minutely-adjustable leather seat, the driver gets a good view of the road ahead as well as clear and simple to read instrumentation. Starting is via key and, as mentioned before, the auto-box defaults to 'drive'. There is a definite knack in driving these types of transmission and it does take a few miles under your belt to understand that a little 'lift' will aid the smooth engagement of gears. Pressing the 'M' button converts the car into a paddle-shift sports car, and activating the 'Sports' button (available in Manual or Auto) tightens up the Skyhook active suspension, as well as quickening the gearchange and making the engine respond even faster with a more sporty note. Oh, and the MSP (Maserati Stability Programme) level of intervention has a slightly higher threshold: so the MSP lets you slide a bit too.

On open country roads the car is great fun to drive. The power delivery is smooth via a drive-by-wire throttle that's perhaps a bit over-long but that might be me. You get 400 bhp at 7,000 although the car will easily rev to its limiter above that. Clicking up the gears in manual, and pouring on a lot of revs, will give you all the performance you'll need, with handling that improves the faster you tip the car into sweeping bends. And of course the great thing about is that four people can enjoy the experience.

It was only two-up around Silverstone but I **think** my passenger was happy enough. Like all modern GP tracks, the Northamptonshire circuit with its many tight corners is not best suited to road cars. And respecting the tyres, gearbox and brakes of the QP I wasn't out to set any records, but it was good sport – if

not exactly representative of the action the car's likely to get. Maserati also make a Quattroporte Sport GT, featuring 20" wheels and a more dynamic mien, but really track-days should be reserved for the company's excellent GranSport Coupé.



The organisers of the Supercar Tour are planning a reprise in 2007, on Friday 4 May. I hope to be there again, and I can strongly recommend it to others. Why not take three guests along and have a whale of a time in good company?

I can think of just the car.

The car tested was a Maserati Quattroporte Executive GT (OTR price is £83,195 including a 3-year piece of mind service package, 3 year unlimited mileage warranty and NavTrak fitted as standard). The only options fitted were: rear parking sensors (£488), Aluminium Brake Calipers (£406), 5-CD changer (£488), rear seat entertainment package - which also includes front TV tuner - of remote control DVD player (£5290).

Sat Nav and single CD player are standard.

Price as tested: £89,867.

Exterior colour: Blu Nettuno. Interior colour: Cuoio. Wood finish: Rosewood.

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