

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Lamborghini Espada - Extra Terrestrial



*The following is an extract from Andy Heywood's feature in Auto Italia magazine, Issue 119 2006. For access to the full feature, plus articles on the new Alfa Romeo Brera, Maserati's latest Quattroporte GT, taking a Ferrari F430 Spider on a day to the seaside, the Abarth Simca 1300 and much more, see [www.auto-italia.co.uk](http://www.auto-italia.co.uk)*

**Like a spaceship parked outside Tescos, the sight of a Lamborghini Espada fighting its way through West London is somewhat surreal. While the van and taxi traffic edges its way forward in ever decreasing circles, the big V12 creates a forcefield of hydrocarbons around itself with each new blip of the throttle. Pedestrians are inadvertently asphyxiated as they cannot help but stare with open mouths while local radio stations are preparing news items based on sightings of a UFO on the Westway.**

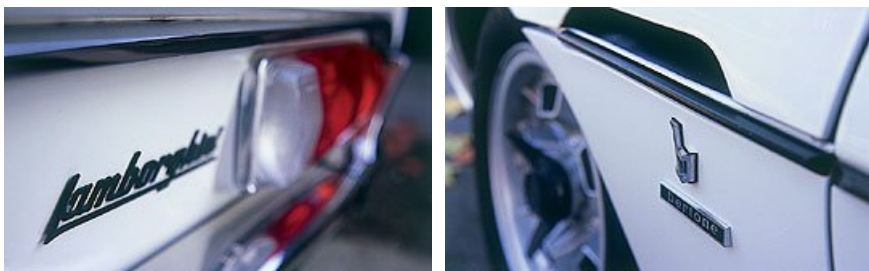
Well, it seems almost as long and wide and certainly has some incredible flat surfaces but even the Battlestar Galactica didn't sound as meaty as this. Compared with the 12-cylinder Ferraris of the same period, the Lamborghini engine seems much more civilised with far less chatter from chains and valve gear. It chooses instead to use the exhaust system to project its voice, ranging from a deep menacing throb at idle, through a kind of American V8 roar when the throttles are opened and building to an Italian-only spine-chilling howl at the top end. It's intoxicating stuff, as our audience found out, but it probably says as much for superior soundproofing and the aforementioned exhaust acoustics from installation in the Espada than any inherent civilisation of the motor – ask a Miura owner if his engine sounds similarly sophisticated!

The Espada prototype was presented at Geneva in March 1968. It was particularly in the use of glass that the Espada broke new ground. A larger glazed area was becoming more common but rarely had the rear windscreen been used without a frame as a tailgate, or the rear panel been glazed to increase rearward vision. Even the rear quarter windows were enlarged to the maximum possible size and hinged uniquely from the top rather than the leading edge.



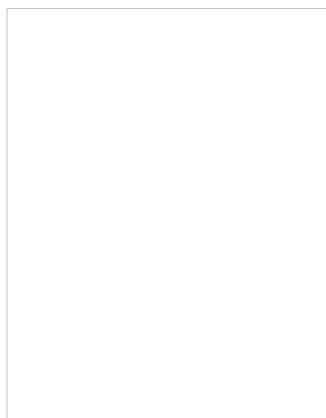
Nothing that had gone before had ever looked like this. The only other true four-seater GT car on offer from an Italian manufacturer at the time was the majestic Maserati Quattroporte but, in comparison, the Espada

looked as though it was from a different planet. Production commenced immediately after Geneva in March 1968. The last series cars were built up to the end of 1978 when production was curtailed as Lamborghini entered a period of receivership, guilty as were so many of confusing the market with too many models, costing too much to build. Hence, when the oil crisis began, they could not contract fast enough to survive.



I was beginning to wonder about our own personal oil crisis as we squeezed through the traffic once more en route to Hyde Park. While the water temperature had been refreshingly stable for an Italian supercar, the prolonged idling was causing a little plug-fouling. Soon, however, a couple of runs on the quiet park roads allowed a little illegal throat clearing and all was well. In fact, for such a space-rocket, the Espada had demonstrated a surprisingly benign temperament. The pedals were heavy by 2006 standards, especially the throttle with its 12 separate butterflies to open, but the power-assisted ZF box made light work of the steering. The driving position was good, the ride compliant from those chunky 70 profile tyres and the advantage of all that glass was real confidence when placing the car on the road. Contemporary road testers always concluded that what was a large car shrank around them, and I think this was the real reason. One could not hustle a Miura or a Countach in such a cool-handed way in traffic. And when the opportunity did present itself, the acceleration to light-speed was always available, in any gear, at any time.

The Espada was an outrageous piece of visual design, and yet all the time a practical, easy-to-drive Grand Tourer with space for family and luggage. It really was the spaceship you could take to the supermarket.



*Words by Andy Heywood and pictures courtesy of Michael Ward.*

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