

CLASSIC DRIVER

Lamborghini Murciélago LP640 - on the track

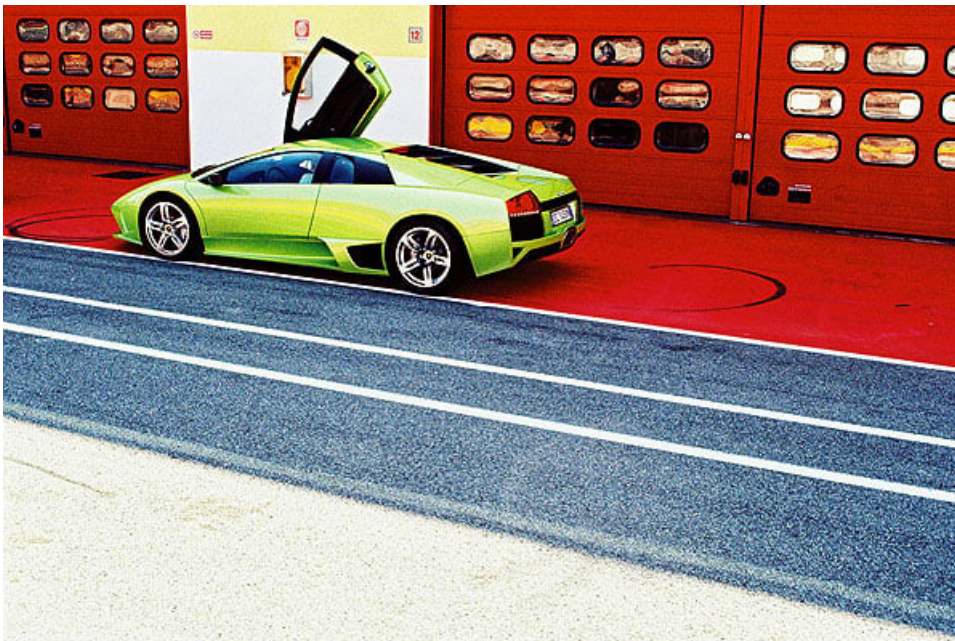


A short and late phone call. No questions, only one mission: I am to test the new Lamborghini Murciélago LP640 on the Circuito del Mugello, right on Ferrari's doorstep. I am to set off the next day with no time to re-consider. I put it out of my mind and try to sleep. But then the "fast forward" key is pressed and the numbers on my digital clock race past; I get up, stand under the shower, sit in the aeroplane to Florence, stand in flickering midday heat at the entrance to the racetrack. Jet black circles on the tarmac remind me of the motorcycle racing of the previous Sunday as I can still see the evidence of last weekend's crowds. "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate" is written in large letters over the entrance: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here". My shirt sticks to my back, I inhale deeply. The air smells of Italian flowers - and sulphur. Then the inevitable roaring, for which I had waited, suddenly comes from the depths of the pitlane. My faithful travel companions - anticipation and respect - suddenly abandon me.





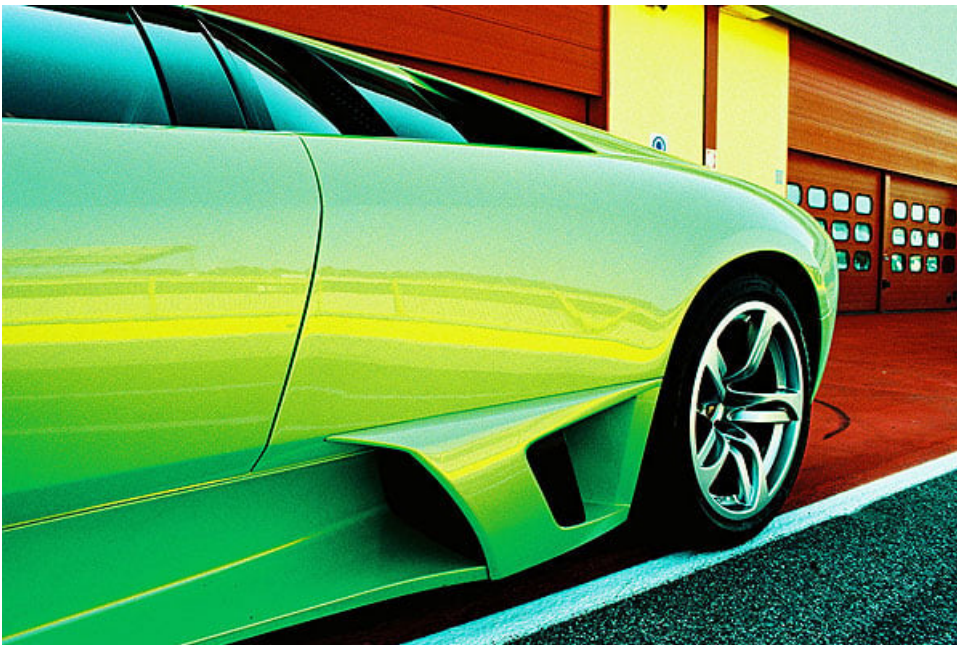
In a stuffy garage the instructor explains the plan of the circuit in an almost military fashion. Seven out of the eleven sentences he uses include the word "Attenzione!" and five times "Pericolo!", (or "Danger!"). I barely recognise my small distorted image reflected in his sunglasses. Then a roller-shutter is pulled up, access to the pitlane is open. I shuffle out into the bright sunlight as dust particles dance before my eyes. I squint, then it's there; the poison-green animal on blood-red bitumen, the bull, the vampire bat, the last real incarnation of the Miura, Countach and Diablo - the Lamborghini Murciélago LP640. I try to gather myself together and lose the nerves in my head as I recall the basic data. 6.5 litres capacity, 640 HP @ 8.000 rpm, 660 Nm @ 6.000 rpm, 340 km/h (211 mph), 3.4 secs) - 100 km/h. Respectfully I take a step back and admire the crystalline features from a safe distance.





In comparison to the first Lamborghini Murciélago, launched at the 2001 Frankfurt Show as a successor to the Diablo and subsequently selling around 2,000 examples, the new Murciélago LP640's visible sharpness and brutality is a revelation. The latest model was extensively re-designed in the Centro Stile in Sant' Agata Bolognese; new bumpers front and back, a new tail diffuser with integrated single exhaust pipe and revised rear lights. In the show model's grey paint finish one could park the new car in a hangar full of Harriers and it would go unnoticed. Fighter jet-functionality is emphasised by the asymmetrically-designed air intakes - the passenger's side is nearly closed while the driver's side has a larger opening for the new oil cooler. Also redesigned are the rear view mirrors and windshield wipers that feature improved aerodynamics, and new light-alloy wheels in "Hermera" design. The glass cover for the 12 -cylinder engine is an option and only increases the menacing effect.

A door slowly swinging upwards on its strut interrupts my monologue.





Although the sun stands at its zenith, it is pleasantly dark and cool inside the LP640. My hand runs over the quilted, diamond-stitched, leather of the seats, doors and roof lining. The highest point of roof measures just 113 cms high, and my sitting position is accordingly prone. I bring the steering wheel into position, step on the clutch, close my eyes and turn the key. A few centimetres behind my spine, twelve cylinders are brought to life with a hoarse roaring. My fingers and tips of my toes begin to itch with electricity. Before me in the pitlane the air flickers. In the rear view mirror the black metal of the engine vibrates. I pull the paddle to select first gear and step carefully on the gas. With a last view of the instruments - 360 km/h! 8.000/min! - I depress the accelerator pedal. The red needle snaps upward, and the pressure in my ears rises. With the feeling of a jet fighter pilot I aim the car for the exit of the pits and the approach to the first corner.





The Circuito del Mugello is one of the most modern and most attractive tracks in Italy. as well as hosting the Italian motorcycle Grand Prix the circuit is used regularly by the Ferrari Formula 1 testing team. From the slow San Donato curve I accelerate into the Poggio Seco, the highest point of the track, then roar downhill over a long straight, changing down, stepping on the brake pedal and feeling the effortless power of the carbon ceramic discs. (Once you have experienced the effect of these as an option there's no going back.) I slam through Arrabiata 1 and Arrabiata 2, into the tight Scarperia bend, my hands always tightly gripping the leather steering wheel. Then I arrive dangerously fast into the long Bucine curve, accelerating with full power out into the pit straight, and feel the adrenaline shoot through my bloodstream.





With an aggressive rev of the throttle I pull into the pits. One lap was enough for me to get to know the car a little. I'd give my soul for another lap right now but the instructor signals me back in straight away. LP640, stands for the "longitudinal posteriore", in other words the engine is mounted lengthways – and it produces 640 HP. In addition to the increase in power, everything else has been improved technically: wheels, suspension, transmission, brakes. The LP 640 has another 60 HP over the 'standard' 6.2 litre model – an improvement achieved by boring and stroking, new cylinder heads, a new crank and a new exhaust. This all gives a performance of 0 – 100 km/h in 3.4 seconds and on to a maximum of 340 km/h, a considerable improvement on already mighty figures.





Arrabiata 1, Arrabiata 2 for the second time. I now drive harder and faster taking greater risks In contrast to the small and compact, agile, Lamborghini Gallardo V10 the aggressive Murciélago is far more brutal. The twelve-cylinder motor is more difficult to control and the car has no ESP to intervene on the limit. Despite the dimensions of a speedboat, the LP640 reacts to variations in throttle, braking and steering like a medium-range missile; surprisingly precisely and direct. You can drive the new car with a confidence never present when behind the wheel of a Countach or Diablo and this is mainly down to the efficient 'e-gear' paddle shift 6-speed, as well as the aforementioned improvements to the suspension and brakes. There's also the ultimate reassurance of the proven VT all-wheel-drive system.



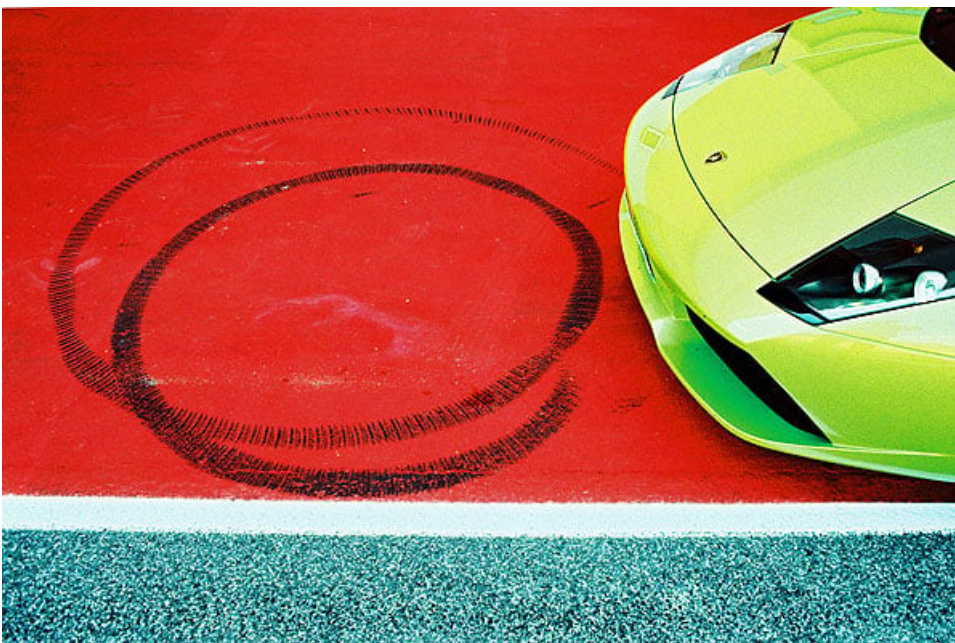


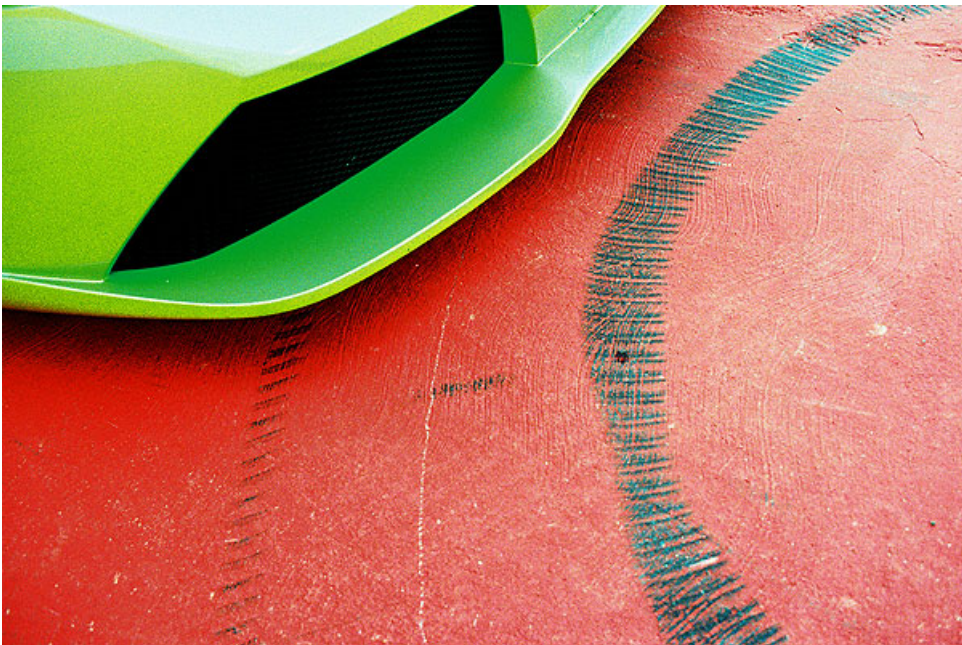
Rettilineo, San Donato, Luco, Poggio Secco. Many curves, many names. I cannot stop now. The tyres - 18" Pirelli P Zero Rosso - are glued to the bitumen. Behind the backrest of my seat I can feel the burning heat of the engine while the air conditioning system blows Arctic air into my lungs. As though possessed I claw at the steering wheel, my right thigh muscle is on fire, my pupils are pinheads - it is the dance with the devil, the total temptation.

Because this car is the end of an era, a grand farewell. The flag has dropped on a new type of supercar, smaller and more convenient. The days of massive '90s over-the-top cars are over. Arrabiata 1, Arrabiata 2 are the turning point. From the Stone Age flint axe to stealth bomber in 3.4 seconds. I ignore the pit signals, I ignore the instructor. The tank is still full, the oil at boiling point. San Donato, Poggio Secco. Perfection, power, control. A hundred thousand howling dogs from hell. "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here" I try to smile - it works. I still have time.

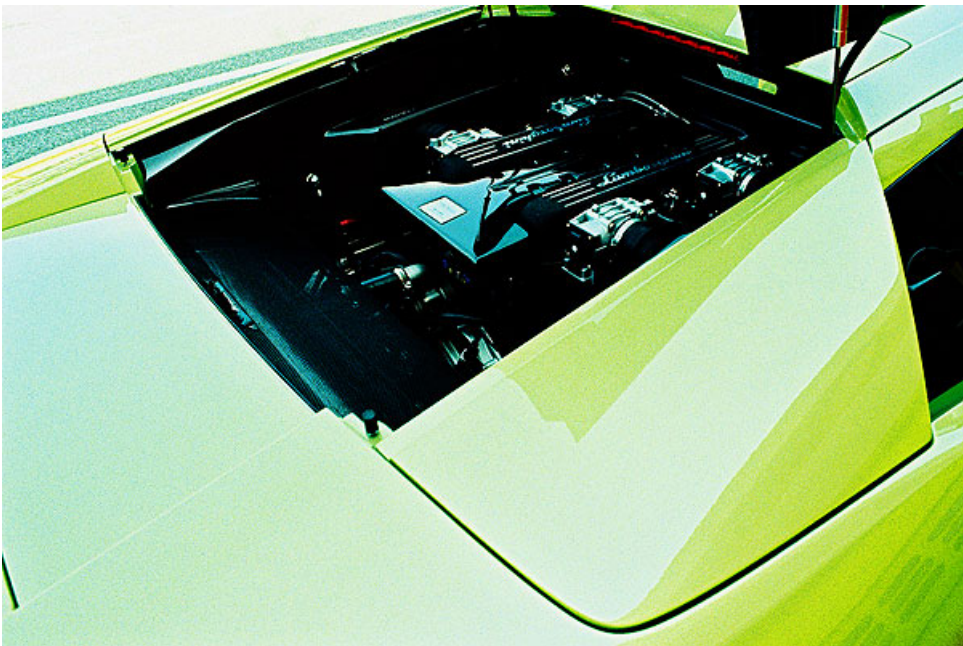
Text & Photo: [Jan Baedeker](#)

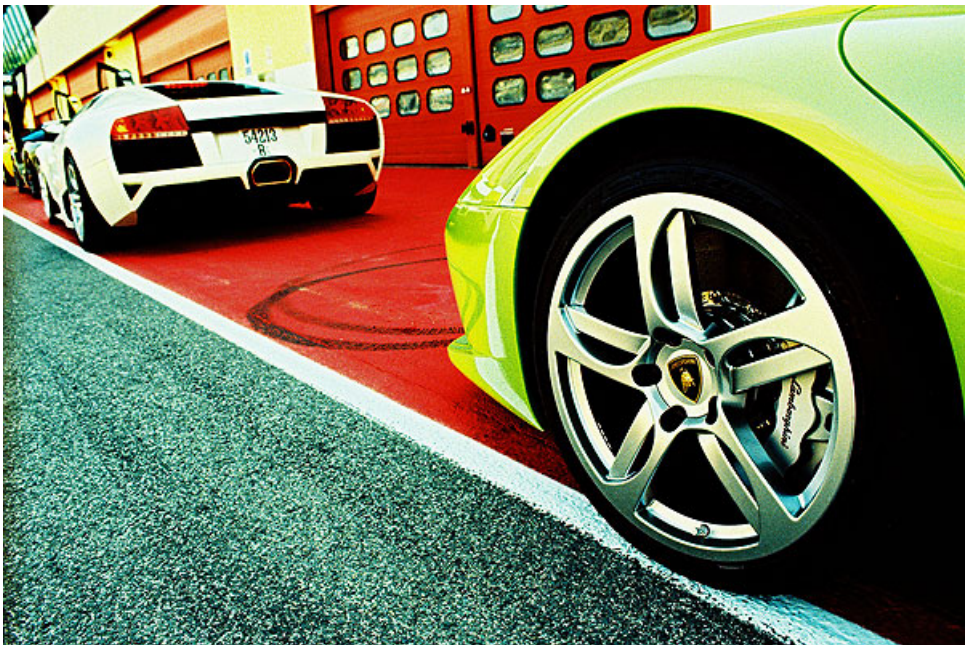
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