

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## The 2007 Maserati Quattroporte



**Three years after the model's introduction, Maserati gives us a conventional automatic for the Quattroporte sporting saloon. With its 6-speed ZF gearbox it surrenders little in performance compared to the DuoSelect (167 mph vs 171 mph, and 0.4 sec in the 0 - 100 km/h sprint), but in all other areas remains as desirable as its semi-automatic brother, both versions featuring a host of changes for the 07 model year.**

Having jumped from one brand new car to another, I can confirm the new automatic certainly does the trick in answering paddle-shift transmissions' critics of jerkiness in full auto, however the surprise of the day was the latest software and mechanical improvements to the DuoSelect - more of which anon.

Let's quickly summarise the two models, both available in the UK at the identical starting price of £77,090 on the road.

The DuoSelect is offered as a 'sportier' alternative, featuring as it does the 6-speed Graziano gearbox (also used by Ferrari and Aston Martin) with no clutch pedal, the gears being engaged by an electro-hydraulic pump and steering wheel paddles. An 'automatic' mode is offered that will shift gear for you too. The transaxle (a rear-mounted gearbox and axle combined) is connected to the engine by a one-piece propshaft running in a rigid torque-tube. In other words, it's the classic sporting set-up favoured by sports and GT cars since the 1950s, a byword for balanced weight distribution and fine handling.



The new Automatic is a re-engineered car that doesn't simply substitute the existing transaxle for a conventional torque converter auto. For starters, it's bolted directly behind the 4.2 litre, 400 HP V8, and drives the rear wheels via a two-piece propshaft. The engine has been lowered and moved rearwards ever so slightly to preserve the car's weight distribution (49% front/51% rear vs 47% front/53% rear for the semi-auto), and it now also features a wet-sump to give a quieter driving experience. You can spot the difference under the bonnet - the Automatic has blue cam covers, the DuoSelect red.

A chunky gearlever allows normal park/reverse/drive motoring, while moving it to the left transforms it to a push/pull 'sequential-effect' shifter. Both versions of the Quattroporte are available in two additional models

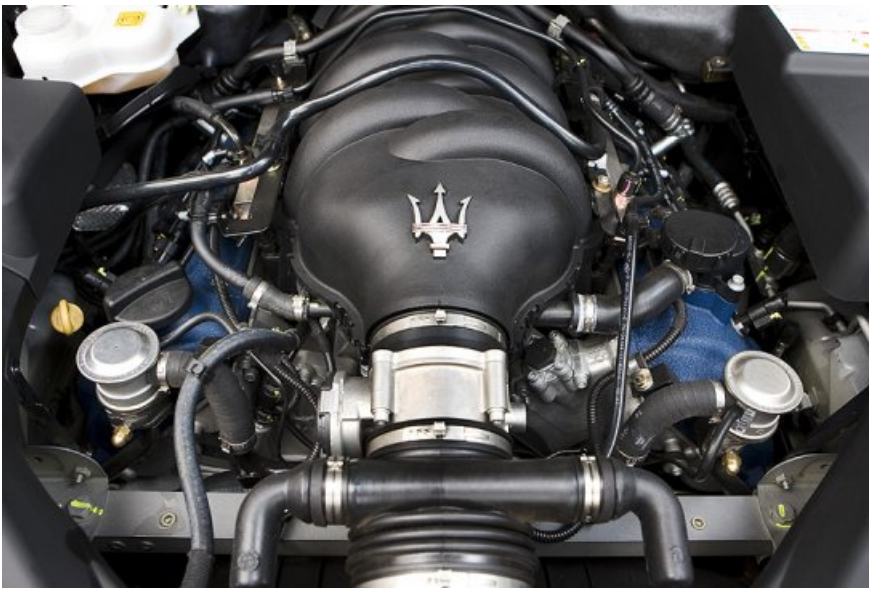
as well as standard; the Executive GT majoring on luxury, while the Sport GT panders to more dynamic tastes. In the latter, the Automatic has paddles behind the steering wheel (à la DB9). The Automatic also features an electronic parking brake that auto-sets in 'Park' (and releases, with a warning sound, in 'Drive').



In theory the luggage space - a little small for its four-seater aspirations - could be expanded with the deletion of the transaxle set up, but given the small production numbers the reality is that it's the one compromised area in a very high performance car that has four doors, spacious internal packaging with good head- and leg-room, looks to die for and one of the best badges out there. Are you really that picky?

The driving experience of the new transmission is exactly what you'd expect from ZF's tried and trusted six-speed married to Maserati's high-revving, smooth and powerful V8. It's a relaxed and effortless way of reaching your destination in style, with seamless up- and down-changes of a nature that will be familiar to Mercedes-Benz and BMW drivers. Although Maserati has upped the torque available at lower revs compared to the DuoSelect (460 Nm @ 4250 rpm vs 451 Nm @ 4500 rpm), it's not in the same league as something like Mercedes' supercharged 5.5 litre for low-down grunty performance, and kickdowns will result in strong acceleration albeit obtained by dipping into the upper reaches of the rev-counter.





On the track the Automatic feels a touch slower than the semi-auto, but amongst everyday traffic on the public highway it's a superbly able performer with very good ride and handling plus the super-silky auto box and decidedly quieter (thanks to the wet-sump) engine that just begs for a long inter-continental trip. Maserati has introduced new 4-piston rear calipers into both cars for the '07 model year and these, coupled with the big (cross-drilled in the Sport GT) front discs, easily pull the big car back from the 140 mph reached in three-quarter's of the test track's one-mile straight.

Driving enthusiasts who select the Automatic will like the 'manual' aspects of the new six-speed. The 'push-pull' lever works like the set-up in a modern-day GT racing car, and is preferred by some drivers to the standard paddles on the Sport GT (and optional across the rest of the range).



These were brand new cars remember, but inside the quality seems to have reached new heights both in

design and execution. There's a new variety of wood (Tanganyika, a much lighter version of Mahogany, with similar striping), Poltrona Frau leather, and as always the Officine Alfieri personalisation programme can come up with a beautifully bespoke motor car. The comfortable seats will also support a few laps of the handling circuit, and rear-seat passengers will enjoy the individually adjustable electric seats.

Maserati GB expect to sell three Automatics for every one DuoSelect in 2007. Proof indeed that making a 'genuine' self-shifter was the correct move for the market, but what about the latest version of the DuoSelect?



Two laps with Ivan Capelli - *left*, ex-F1 driver and the Director of the Maserati Master GT driving course - in a semi-automatic Sport GT show that whatever the car's aspirations as a rival to German über-saloons, its soul is 100% Italian. Given a rewarding sequence of bends, slip the gearbox into 'Sport,' click down a couple of cogs and revel in the worked-over suspension set-up that now turns in better and enables the driver to really use, in Capelli's opinion, their finest asset; the feeling through the driver's seat that can make a car 'think' its way through the apex.

Traction control on or off, with Capelli at the wheel the big car just smears its way around the small karting track at Millbrook - testament to the excellent un-aided suspension set-up as well as the electronic addenda. Making full use of the car's 400 HP at 7000 rpm in 'Manual' produces distinctly faster acceleration - a good thing - but the real party piece of the latest software is the car's behaviour in DuoSelect 'Auto'.

Out of all the electro-hydraulic transmissions I have sampled (F430, 612 Scaglietti, Vanquish, Maserati GranSport, 599 GTB and Vanquish) in full automatic mode, the 2007 Quattroporte's is head and shoulders the best. And Maserati dealers can upgrade all new cars to take the latest software as improvements come on line. Even flooring the accelerator and taking each change to the maximum will only bring a little dipping of the nose of the car - it's that good.

So what started as a commendation for the torque-converter Automatic has finished as a eulogy to the revised DuoSelect.



It's a hard choice but one thing is clear - if your experiences of a Quattroporte were at launch, make an appointment to test-drive one of the latest model cars at your earliest convenience. And give the new [GranTurismo](#) some serious consideration too, judging by the current QP it's going to be a superb DB9 alternative.

*The **2007 Maserati Quattroporte** range is available in three configurations, there being no price difference between DuoSelect and Automatic models.*

*On The Road prices in the UK are as follows:*

**Quattroporte** - £77,090

**Quattroporte Executive GT** - £85,990

**Quattroporte Sport GT** - £83,290

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**Photos:** Maserati GB

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