
Grand Tourer: Maserati GranTurismo

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This is a super car. Please don't confuse that statement with the over-used expression 'supercar', as Maserati's current GT is more of a rival to a Mercedes CL than an F430. That said, anyone considering a pre-owned DB9 or Bentley Continental GT would be well advised to try the GranTurismo before they commit to the more familiar choices in the 'daily-driver-needing-some-space-for-passengers' category.

Launched at the Geneva Salon in 2007, the handsome genuine 2+2 is becoming a more familiar sight on British roads although it is, however, much rarer than equivalent offerings from 'the opposition'. The company announced a sportier 'S' version at this year's Swiss show, with a more powerful engine, semi-automated gearbox and 'dual-cast technology' brakes.

This will bring the car more into Aston Martin V8/DB9 crossover territory, rather than a car that meets the spirit of 1960s GTs - such as the company's own **3500GT**, **Aston Martin DB6** and **Ferrari 330 GT 2+2**. Reviews of the 'S' will hit the newsstands later this month, but we had the opportunity of a long weekend with the standard car on 'active service'; for a trip to Suffolk to drive the wonderful **1950 Ferrari 166/195**, and a three-up outing to Oxford for lunch.



Two longish round-trips and some minor local town work all completed on one tank of fuel, please note. That's consumption of around 22mpg - pretty good for a 177mph Maserati.

While the 'S' will have sportier, Alcantara-laden, hip-hugging seats, the driving position in the regular GranTurismo is very good. The Comfort pack as fitted to the test car has seat-heating, a driver's seat memory function and a powered steering wheel that dips and rises on entry and exit. It takes a little while to accustom oneself to the slightly forward driving position (to allow genuine legroom in the back), however.

Unlike its predecessor, the GranTurismo has a conventional torque-converter 6-speed gearbox, mounted behind the wet-sump engine - a carry-over from the revised Quattroporte. The 4244cc V8 is mounted well back, so even without a transaxle the 1880kg car has near perfect (49% front, 51% rear) weight distribution. Performance is quoted as 0-62mph in 5.2 seconds, the engine and gearbox working together to provide comfortable, torquey (460Nm @ 4750rpm) progress rather than neck-snapping acceleration.



It's a bit heavier than a DB9, and has a bit more power than a V8 Vantage. So, for those familiar with both cars, imagine substituting a refined 'thrummy' roar for the Astons' bellow and you'll probably understand the driving sensation easily enough. There's little road noise or bumping and crashing from the fitted (optional) 20" 'Birdcage' alloy wheels, and it will cover massive motorway distances quietly and - as already stated - surprisingly economically.

The steering may be a little light but full marks to Maserati for the gearchange. You can swap between Sport in full automatic or paddle- or gearlever-actuated 'manual', but I liked to keep it in auto and use the paddles as an override. I don't know what the Italian manufacturer has done with the switching on these but they are far and away the best I've experienced; you get a satisfying, well-damped 'click' with every change.



Using Sport does get the most performance out of the car (as it also tightens up the optional Skyhook active suspension and re-maps the engine) but serial speed freaks should really look elsewhere, or maybe wait for the 'S'. The brakes are not the car's strong point - perhaps it's more perception and familiarity than pure performance, but if Maserati offer the improved 'S' brakes I'd choose them over standard.

The interior is luxuriously trimmed in Poltrona Frau leather - although the headlining looks a little downmarket as standard fabric. Alcantara is available as an option for this, as are other bespoke interior colours and finishes and exterior shades, too. You'll be bumping up the car's UK list price from its £78,605, though, if you dip too heavily into the extras list.



So who's going to buy a Maserati GranTurismo? Family men and women for sure, as the car is more than suitable for a day out with larger children, or adult friends and relations. Buyers in the Aston Martin/Porsche/Bentley segment looking for something 'different' will like it too.

It's also got an indefinable hint of 'old money' class about it; it's not a shouty look-at-me supercar. It's an extremely good GT car that's quite simply, super.



The Maserati GranTurismo carries a basic price in the UK of £78,605. Options fitted to the test car included: Nero Carbonio metallic paint (£552); 20" 'Birdcage' alloy wheels in Grigio Mercury (£2350); Skyhook electronically variable damping system (£1721); Bose surround sound (£1175); Comfort pack front seats (£1293).

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