

CLASSIC DRIVER

Maserati Quattroporte S: First Drive



'S'? A hardcore version of Maserati's four-door, breathed-upon by the engineers that created the full-on GranTurismo S? You could not be further away from the truth. The Modenese company chose Salzburg to launch the 4.7-litre, upgraded version of the Quattroporte and, having driven it on a route that took in autobahn and rolling Alpine C-road, there's only one conclusion: it's the best all-round motor car the company makes.

Leaving the dynamics of the range-topping car to one side, the Quattroporte's fine lines have been further refined by Pininfarina for 2008. The car is longer (by 45mm, mainly by virtue of a restyled nose and GranTurismo-type grille), has subtle sill mouldings, new front and rear bumpers, wing mirrors and front and rear lights.

It's the latter that will get attention on the road, as the company has used LED technology front and rear to impose what they describe as a 'tougher look'. Unlike Audi and Porsche, these are used for braking and indicating rather than 'running', but nevertheless do freshen the classic lines of the car.



Inside, it's business as usual with Poltrona Frau leather (in additional shades of *Marrone Corniola* and *Sabbia*), and wood aplenty. The dash, in fact, has been slightly redesigned with a revised centre console for the Multimedia controls (by Bose, as an option, or Maserati, as standard).

And if dinner party conversation flags, the mention that your new Maserati has a 'Polished Wenge' interior is sure to raise comment... On a serious note, the latter is a very attractive dark brown hard wood, *Millettia Laurentii*, from Zaire, apparently. 'Starwood' and 'Vavona' are two other, new for the 2008 model, woody options.



The one thing that's not a matter of choice now is the transmission. The paddle-actuated, semi-automatic DuoSelect of QPs past is gone. It's now a conventional automatic on all cars in the manufacturer's range, apart from the GranTurismo S. The 6-speeder from ZF has been optimised to work with the new engine, a 4.7-litre now producing 430bhp at 7000rpm (compared with the 4.2's 400bhp at similar revs). It is a superb combination that you can trundle along in 'auto', or flick the lever over to manual and use the paddles behind the wheel.

Keeping the new car on the Tarmac comes courtesy of 19in 'V-Style' alloy wheels and Skyhook, continuously adaptable suspension, while the dual-cast front discs (360mm, with 6-piston monoblock calipers) give excellent feel and stopping-power totally up to the job for a big, powerful GT.



On the road, the extra power of the Quattroporte S makes itself immediately apparent. Maserati has been

very clever by matching engine to gearbox to suspension. Even the wheels, an inch larger than the smaller-capacity car's, seem to suit the driving dynamics of the S to perfection. There's little thump, no rattle, and the Sport button tightens the car up in an instant for faster driving on twisty roads, with little discernible degradation in ride quality.

Motorway cruising – a natural habitat for the Quattroporte – can be done with the suspension out of Sport mode and is a quiet, relaxing process, aided, no doubt, by the introduction of laminated glass for all windows. There's little wind noise or tyre roar – the big car will win friends used to German, similarly priced, saloons. In contrast to the fire-breathing GranTurismo S, the four-door's engine note is muted; rasping and throaty, but not intrusive or artificially enhanced for the marketing department.



And speaking of which, please Maserati, don't sell the Quattroporte S as 'a machine for our customers who like to use their cars on the track', or 'one that will be familiar to supercar buyers looking for a family alternative'. In essence, an AMG, Audi RS or BMW M alternative.

That would be so, so wrong. It's firmly in Aston Martin, Bentley and Ferrari territory for looks, image and driving pleasure (if not outright performance that, to be frank, you're unlikely to use nowadays). Whisper it: it's surprisingly economical, too.





According to the company, one in three buyers comes 'straight to Maserati'. By that, it means rejecting out of hand an alternative, top-of-the-range four-door (read 'German') saloon. To that, I think, you can add some comparably priced new, or pre-owned, coupés - the Quattroporte S is a great car.

P.S. While I'm offering suggestions to the Modenese company, can we have this engine/chassis/gearbox/braking combination in the already very fine GranTurismo? What a car that would be.

Maserati Quattroporte S - The Facts:

Wet-sump, 4.7-litre V8 produces 430bhp at 7000rpm, 490Nm torque at 4750rpm (82% of torque available at 2500rpm).

Six-speed ZF automatic transmission with 'Sport' and 'Ice' modes.

Weight distribution: 49% front, 51% rear.

Length: 5052mm

Width: 1896 mm

Height: 1438mm

0 - 100km/h (62mph) acceleration: 5.4 seconds.

Maximum speed: 280km/h (174mph).

The Maserati Quattroporte S costs £85,000 in the United Kingdom. Included as standard are: 19in wheels; Skyhook suspension; dual-cast 360mm front discs; Polished Wenge wood interior trim; electric seats with 3-position memory for drivers; Maserati Multimedia System with 7in screen, featuring sat-nav and RDS tuner; Bose surround sound system; Bi-Xenon headlights with adaptive light control.

Extras available include: metallic paint £423; power sunroof £1368; Alcantara headlining, colour upon request £1134; Bose Multimedia system £2538; front seat heating £528.

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