

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## Driven: Maserati GranTurismo S

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**The standard Maserati GranTurismo is an impressive car. Most testers, however, commented that with a little more power and even better brakes it would - for the money - take all before it. Having spent a long weekend away in the GranTurismo S, I would wholeheartedly agree.**

The Modenese company has just launched a fully automatic version of the 'S', but the black car you see here is equipped with the 'paddle', electro-hydraulically actuated, six-speed gearbox that will be familiar to anyone with recent Ferrari/Maserati/Alfa Romeo 8C experience.



In fact, due to conflicting diary commitments, I'd had to miss out on the May 2009 international driving launch of the torque-converter GranTurismo S; a pity, but I'd heard so much about the 'manual' car that I couldn't wait to drive it.

Comparing the S with a regular GranTurismo, the differences in power and torque are slight on paper but immediately noticeable behind the wheel. The standard car is a powerful, smooth GT but the S, with its extra 35bhp at a slightly lower 7000rpm, and additional 30Nm torque at an identical 4750rpm, is a much stronger performer.

It also stops much better, too, thanks to its bigger Brembo brakes. The front discs are now dual-cast - a mixture of cast iron for the disc itself and aluminium for the hub - and 360mm (up from 330mm) in diameter.

Hence braking is a superbly balanced affair with good 'bite' and excellent feel.

You could drive some Alpine passes with these; they are that good and really should be on the regular car as standard, or at least available as an option.

One of the GranTurismo's strongpoints is its versatility and, despite its more sporting attitude, the S is no less practical. The front seats may be more supportive but they still allow six-footers reasonable space when seated in the back. The luggage area, too, at 260 litres, is more than a Ferrari 612 Scaglietti's and fine for a week away.









'Skyhook' active suspension is a £1684 option in the UK and not fitted to our car. As a result, there's only one setting - hardish - that works pretty well under all circumstances. Less compromised than the standard car maybe - but as effective at high speed, maximum-attack cornering as it is on bumpy British B-roads.

What the driver *can* adjust, however, is the setting for the gearbox, and this really does make a difference. 'Auto Normal' lets the car do its own thing and it's terrific; really, really good - my, if only this had been available 10 years ago, none of the TV-series-derived 'flappy-paddle' comments would ever have taken root. Press 'Sport' in Auto Normal and you get changes at higher rpm, with a double declutch as required.





Oh, and Sport also opens the pneumatic valves in the exhaust and, wow, that *is* impressive. What a sound!

'Manual Normal' (now I know I'm going on a bit, but bear with me...) is, well, the gearbox activated by the paddles. Select Sport in manual and you then get the awesome noise and a sharpened throttle response, too. If you do this at over 5500rpm, with a good carpet's-worth of throttle, you are now in 'Sport with MC-Shift'. This is quick. Not Ferrari 599GTB quick, but it's very, very fast: 100 milliseconds, going down to just 40 milliseconds for the time taken to engage a single gear.

Floor the throttle in third and fourth when in MC-Shift mode and the car will change up with just a little 'bump' as the gears engage. It's very satisfying. You can see where the development work by test drivers such as Ivan Capelli and Andrea Bertolini has gone. Take the GranTurismo S onto a fast, flowing circuit such as Goodwood and it would impress. It feels so much quicker than the non-S version.

Externally, the cognoscenti will know that you are driving a GranTurismo S from the twin oval exhaust pipes, the red-bar Trident badge, black front grilles, a small rear spoiler and side-skirts. Despite the warpaint it's still a head-turner; a classy Pininfarina-designed Italian grand tourer.









Behind the wheel, it's much as the standard car and we would repeat our main recommendation that you should order the Alcantara headlining (a £920 option). Our car had the no-cost option full leather – and I'd pass on that as you really need the Alcantara seat inserts for extra cornering grip.

Fuel consumption over a few days of fastish driving mixed with jams did not come as a nasty surprise: 18mpg, or around 15l/100km. Worse than the 22mpg we got last year, but not too bad for a 183mph four-seater.

I was expecting to conclude this review with a comment along the lines of: "Well, let's wait for the torque-converter automatic GranTurismo S... proper automatic gearbox, great brakes and a meaty engine – that will be the one to have..."

That may still be the case, but for those looking for the unmatched speed and accuracy of a sequential 'box, together with a surprisingly usable capability in Auto Normal, punchy performance, great brakes, an exhaust note to die for and a practical cabin – this GranTurismo S fits the bill right now.

*The Maserati GranTurismo S carries a basic price in the UK of £88,000.*

*Options fitted to the test car included: Nero Carbonio metallic paint (£540); 20" 'Neptune' alloy wheels in Grigio Mercury (£460); Painted brake calipers (£414); Comfort pack front seats (£1265).*

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*Photos: Classic Driver*



















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