

CLASSIC DRIVER

Of toads and bulls: Rally tour in Lamborghini Espada

Lead

Four seats, twelve cylinders and Seventies styling: to look at, the Lamborghini Espada is one of Classic Driver's great favourites. At the Schloss Bensberg Rallye Historique, we finally took the wheel – and found a few surprises in store...

The Lamborghini is a bull – but to drive it, you need to squat like a toad

The Lamborghini may be the bull in the automotive flock but, when it comes to the driving, you need to squat at the wheel like a toad. Because the seats (or should we say armchairs) are well-upholstered and the roof is low and the typically Italian driving position requires a retracted neck, extended arms and strangely bent legs. All very toad-like. Nevertheless, the Espada is easier to control than the combination of V12 power, four-seater configuration and speedboat dimensions suggest. Lamborghini had restored an S3 GT especially for the Schloss Bensberg Classics (adding an additional radiator), and the engine ran more smoothly than any Espada engine has a right to.

Confident and (nervously) agile

The Espada can accelerate happily in first gear to somewhere near 60mph. My co-driver Gerald and I switch between the second and third gears, trying to keep the rev-counter needle at a constant 3000-5000rpm, where power output is at its best and the engine note is the most pleasing. In fact, the Seventies-style controls were easy and enjoyable to use, but just one word of caution: on wet leaves and in damp bends, the Espada can respond nervously, and there's a risk that the huge rear end will suddenly break away. A light mist of unburnt fuel and exhaust gases is all part of the four-seater's special aura, and the heady atmosphere can add to the likelihood of throwing caution to the winds.

Even though we proved no match for the likes of a Gullwing, at the end of the day I was reluctant to hand back the Espada – toad-like driving position or not.

Photos: Jan Baedeker / Nanette Schärf

Gallery

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