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Maserati Kyalami: Out of Africa

20 April 2014 | Alex Easthope

At the 1967 Formula One season opener, held at Kyalami in South Africa, Pedro Rodríguez scored Cooper's final Grand Prix victory in a Maserati-powered T81. Nine years on, the Trident Marque christened its new flagship coupé after the location of that momentous win...

Perhaps more impressive was that, for most of the race, Rodríguez had to tussle the outdated and cumbersome Cooper with just two gears due to earlier gearbox trouble. So, does the Maserati Kyalami live up to its namesake?

De Tomaso in disguise?



First things first, the Kyalami isn't strictly a Maserati. When Alejandro de Tomaso found himself in

charge of the Trident following Citroën's liquidation of the company in 1974, the situation was bleak and he was reportedly desperate to release a flagship model to get things back on track.

Incidentally, his De Tomaso Longchamp (a notchback, Ford V8-powered coupé) wasn't selling particularly well so, in a seeming stroke of financial genius, he employed Pietro Frua to subtly tweak its Ghia design in a more elegant fashion. Add in a less primitive and more reliable Maserati power plant and the job was done, both quickly and relatively inexpensively.

Italian heart



This inevitably upset the purists, who treated it as some sort of half-breed, but the result was actually quite good. The Longchamp's sharp corners were rounded off, its square headlights were swapped out for more traditional round ones and the car was lengthened, lowered and widened considerably to give a more squat and sporty-looking stance.

It was originally offered with a 265HP 4.2-litre V8, mated to the ZF five-speed gearbox (a three-speed automatic was offered as an option), until 1978 when the later 290HP 4.9-litre V8 was made available, along with the three-speed auto as standard. Most cars, however, were still specified with the manual 'box, probably because of the auto's sluggish performance.

Liberal leather and comfy carpets



If the exterior couldn't win over the critics, then the interior definitely should have done. It's a luscious affair, with sumptuous, high-quality Connolly leather liberally covering almost every surface and deep-pile carpets that you'd rather lie down on than sink your feet into. And thanks to that boxy roof, even the tallest of passengers can enjoy its impressive Grand Touring capabilities.

The Kyalami was underrated and expensive, and only around 200 cars were built before production ceased in 1983. As a result, they represent good value for money considering their rarity. You'd never tire of telling people the story behind the name, either. For that, it might be worth the price alone.

Photos: Marc Vorgers

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