

*Bazaar
Drives*

THE SUPER STEALTH SUV

Maserati's new Levante — at once luxurious, thrilling and practical — is setting a new standard for SUVs.

By **KATARINA KROSLAKOVA**

Katarina Krosiakova.



weekly coffee budget right there. Is it worth it? Absolutely. Life is too short to drive boring cars.

Standard features in My Maserati include front and rear parking sensors, blind-spot alert, rear camera, keyless entry and dual-zone climate control. Adjustable air suspension and Skyhook shock absorbers ensure an even ride, and the all-wheel-drive system is almost daring you to put it to the test on tough terrain. A significant improvement in the 2019 model is the Integrated Vehicle Control (IVC), which doesn't just correct vehicle instability — it helps prevent it.

The driver experience is almost flawless. The seats are comfortable, plush (heated, of course) and adjustable in 12 directions. The strict Maserati standards of perfection have been maintained with hand-stitched leather, an intuitive dashboard and soft-close doors.

Frustrations: the indicator and high-beam lever require my left hand to leave the steering wheel and reach behind the paddle. My (Italian) husband shrugged when I complained. "Ah, the Italians. They've never been good at ergonomics. They make amazing engines."

I also reverted to Google Maps for more up-to-date sat nav, and I'm a bit of a greedy bugger with extras such as head-up display and rear window shading, so as my wishlist grew, so did the price tag.

But without a doubt, the best feature of the Levante, which made most frustrations disappear, is its magnificent booty. Not only are those rear curves deliciously styled, but the capacity and flexibility made a critical milestone even more memorable.

In the 10 days of testing, we packed My Maserati with an enormous Alex Perry wedding dress, a tuxedo, a high chair, travel cots, toys, half a pantry, presents, champagne, a steamer and much much more. Oh, and two adults and two kids.

If a car can make packing fun, then this is a Maserati for modern times. ■

Of all the first-world problems that come with the tough gig of reviewing luxury cars for a living, saying goodbye is the hardest. It can be emotionally traumatic to return a vehicle after it's been yours for a few days, not to mention the questioning and disappointment that comes from your offspring: "Where's Mum's new big grey car gone?" (Sorry, Bambino, you're not going to like the answer.) For the purpose of this review, I shall refer to the 2019 Maserati Levante as "My Maserati". It only feels right.

The reason Maserati's first SUV is so appealing and so damn enjoyable to drive is that you don't actually feel like you're driving an SUV at all. It's when I pack accoutrements into every available inch of space that it becomes apparent that My Maserati is a "have your cake and eat it, too" kind of proposition: it looks sexy, it's very spacious and yet it still handles like a sports car.

When Maserati introduced the Levante to its range in 2016, it was responding to a boom in the SUV sector. It was a shrewd, well-timed move by a heritage Italian car maker traditionally known for performance-driven sleek sports cars with racing engines in its sedans and coupés. The Levante was not only the brand's highest seller that year, but it also brought valuable female clientele to the typically male marque. Due to its lower price point, it addressed a new area of the market, with 90 per cent of Levantes sold to first-time Maserati purchasers.

Maserati is now offering a new 2019 entry-level variant to open those hallowed Maserati gates a little wider for those happy to spend upwards of \$125,000 for their dream Italian SUV. Not that these Italians ever want to be mainstream: the quantities remain limited, with total sales for the year projected at 500 units. So what does the driver get for \$125,000, and what has been left out? The Ferrari-built engine has been detuned: the previous Levante S offered 316kW/580Nm, as opposed to the new entry-level's torque of 257kW/500nM. What those numbers basically mean is My Maserati's reduced power output makes the car less aggressive, but, conveniently, it also makes it a tad more economical.

Not that we're pretending My Maserati — or any Maserati — is a fuel-efficient vehicle. Each time you switch to Sports mode, open those exhaust valves and revel in the aural signature of the brand, the petrol cost is pretty much your



The Maserati Levante.

VITAL STATISTICS

NEED FOR SPEED:
0–100km/h in 6 seconds,
with top speed 251 km/h

ENGINE & TRANSMISSION:
Petrol, V6 twin turbo, Q4
intelligent all-wheel-drive,
eight-speed automatic gearbox

BEST BITS:
Sleek design, comfort for all
passengers, boot capacity,
Ferrari-built engine

WORST BITS:
Some ergonomic
challenges, extras add up

COMPETITORS:
Porsche Cayenne, Range
Rover Sport, BMW X5,
Mercedes-Benz GLE

HOW MUCH:
From \$125,000

Clockwise from far left:
Valentino scarf, \$867,
farfetch.com; Louis Vuitton
City Guide: Rome, \$44,
au.louisvuitton.com; Prada key
ring, \$225, matchesfashion.com;
Fendi sunglasses, \$680,
(02) 9540 0500.

TRAVEL COMPANIONS



DANIEL GOODE: STYLED BY CAROLINE TRAN. KATARINA KROSLAKOVA WEARS SCANLAN THEODORE DRESS, \$1600, SCANLANTHEODORE.COM. HAIR BY KOH AT VIVIENS CREATIVE; MAKEUP BY NAOMI MCFADDEN AT UNION. DANIEL GOODE IS REPRESENTED BY THE ARTIST GROUP. CAR: DEJAN SOKOLOVSKI. STILL LIFE STYLED BY SAWANTHA WONG. PRICES APPROXIMATE. SEE BUYLINES FOR STOCKISTS