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# Alfa Romeo Stelvio SUV – Road Test

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Alfa Romeo's Stelvio SUV... Can be bought with your head or your heart...

By David Miles (Miles Better News Agency).

Such is the new car buying public's obsession with driving SUV/Crossover styled vehicles that even iconic sporting brands such as Aston Martin, Porsche, Bentley, Lamborghini, Maserati, Ferrari and even luxury car producer Rolls Royce feel-the-need to enter this market sector.

They join the already established premium brands of Audi, BMW, Jaguar, Range Rover, Mercedes-Benz and Lexus, plus most recently Alfa Romeo who launched their Stelvio



Crossover, their first production SUV in over 100-years. It is named after Italy's most famous mountain pass.

The Stelvio is a five door, five seater Crossover with an aerodynamic coupé roofline over a muscular body. The vehicle has huge and distinctive road presence, fronted by the iconic Alfa Romeo grille with its traditional offset numberplate. At the rear is a steeply raked tailgate with exhaust tailpipes incorporated at each side of the chunky rear bumper. Alfa models have not always been known for their quality of reliability and fit and finish, and I noticed the fuel filler flap of my test car didn't fit flush into the bodywork, with its trailing edge sitting proud of the rear quarter panel. The electrically operated tailgate gives easy access to a 525 litres (18.54 cu.ft) boot, about average in its class. There are split folding rear seats to increase this space but no official figure is given by Alfa. I suggest when the seat backs are folded the load space will go up by around another 1,000 litres (about 35 cu.ft).

Linking the Stelvio's front and rear section there is the coupé roofline, high waistline, bold wheelarches and the usual sill and wheelarch protective mouldings. The eye-catching alloy wheels, depending on the spec level, range from 17 to 20-inches and are all shod with low profile tyres.

Mainstream Stelvio prices range from £33,990 for the rear wheel drive 2.2 litre 180 hp diesel through other Q4 all-wheel-drive models, with 2.0 litre turbocharged petrol 200 and 280 hp engines and the 2.2 litre 180 and 210 hp turbodiesel units – to £45,390. To be added later this year, right at the top of the range is the Quadrifoglio 2.9 litre Bi-Turbo petrol 510 hp, 176 mph 4WD variant with an estimated price of around £36,500. All Stelvio models have a ZF eight-speed automatic gearbox as standard. PCP purchase prices over 48-month/10,000 miles per annum period, start from £439 a month, and Alfa is currently offering between £1k and £3k deposit contributions to the finance deal.

Depending on the engine chosen Stelvio mainstream models are available with the choice of four trim and equipment levels. These are Stelvio, Super, Speciale and Milano Edizione and



it was the latter with the 2.0 litre, four cylinder 280 hp turbo petrol engine auto with Q4 4WD I recently tried, with its price tag of £45,390. That's not dear in its premium market sector and as it's classed by Alfa Romeo as an 'exclusive version' it is fully loaded with specification.

The entry trim level Stelvio offers a comprehensive standard specification. This includes 17-inch alloy wheels, LED rear lights and a double lateral chrome exhaust pipe. Inside there is dual-zone climate control, Alfa DNA rotary driving mode selector, a 3.5-inch TFT colour cluster instrument panel, UConnect 8.8-inch display infotainment system with DAB radio plus Bluetooth/AUX multimedia connectivity, an eight-speaker audio system and two front and two rear USB ports. A multi-function leather steering wheel houses all the main controls.

Move up to the Stelvio Super level and the additions include 18-inch alloy wheels and front parking sensors. The interior of the Super features an 8.8-inch infotainment system with 3D navigation system featuring European maps and 7-inch TFT instrument cluster, as well as a two-tone leather dashboard and leather and cloth upholstery.

The Stelvio Speciale level adds 19-inch alloy wheels with red brake calipers, chrome window surround, Bi-Xenon 35W headlights and power folding door mirrors. Inside the cabin, the Speciale benefits from heated front leather seats with six-way adjustment and dedicated four-way power lumbar controls. Aluminium shift paddles on the steering column co-ordinate with the aluminium interior finishing's and metal pedals to complete the look.

The Stelvio Milano Edizione version I tried, described as a 'launch edition', adds sport leather seats, a superb 10-speaker Sound theatre system, 20-inch alloy wheels, keyless entry and an Athermic windscreen, privacy glass with black gloss window surround, electrically adjustable and heated front seats and a rear-view camera with dynamic grid lines.

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The interior design continues the sports theme, highlighted by the deep cowled dials, and



it's very much geared towards being a driver's cars although passengers are well catered for. The huge gear shift levers fitted to the steering wheel highlight what I mean by being a driver-focussed design. Unfortunately they mask the conventional two control stalks for the indicators and wipers and you need to learn their use by instinct rather than by sight. Between the front seats there are other controls including Alfa's DNA driving mode selector that allows Dynamic, Normal and Automatic Eco efficiency driving characteristics.

The Stelvio will accommodate two adult passengers and three children with ease, or four adults. Taller rear seat passengers might find the headroom tight because of the coupé roofline. Visibility isn't great all-round the car due to thick pillars and to the rear because of the steep angle of the tailgate window, but the rear parking camera on my test car helped with reversing. Overall the interior design is interesting and seemingly well put together with good quality textured and dimpled finishes to the soft touch trim, also the textured carbon-fibre trim inserts and the leather upholstery look and feel high quality. The sports front seats are electrically adjustable but I found them a bit on the tight side for width between the side bolsters and I'm not that fat; not lean, but not that big.



Where the Stelvio scores highly against most of its rivals such as the Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC, BMW X3 and Porsche Macan is its fun-to-drive attitude. That is not something that can be said for many SUVs which are mostly efficient and capable but not necessarily fun. With its 50/50 weight distribution and lightweight construction (with use of aluminium for parts of the body and suspension and a carbon-fibre drive shaft between the front and rear axles) the Stelvio feels well balanced and the Q4 all-wheel-drive traction adds that extra grip although it doesn't operate all the time. Mostly it operates on-road in rear wheel drive and only when extra grip is needed does it transfer up to 50% of its traction to the front wheels. There is no function to lock it into permanent four wheel or two wheel drive so although classed as an SUV/Crossover it isn't for anything more than off road travel over gravel tracks or a flat and dry field of grass, but it does have hill descent control should the driver feel adventurous.



The steering is very fast-acting and so it responds well, changing direction with ease and preciseness. It performed best for me on fast sweeping open country roads. Around town it was easy enough to drive although visibility isn't great, and on motorways it cruised happily enough but not with any special level of enjoyment.

The downside was the ride comfort. The firm suspension settings enhanced the road holding capabilities but in combination with the 20-inch wheels and low profile tyres fitted to my top spec model, the ride was on the hard side and not compliant. It fidgeted over poorer road surfaces, felt generally unsettled and the impacts from potholes were amplified into the cabin.



But back to better news in the form of the 2.0 litre, 280 hp four cylinder turbo petrol engine. It's likely that more customers, despite the insecurities of the future of diesel, will chose the 2.2 litre turbodiesel units, but being a driver's car with a sporting pedigree I think the turbo petrol engine will provide more driving enjoyment. With a huge 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque, and for a petrol engine available at 2,250 rpm, this unit is very responsive even in its 'eco' setting. Generally the engine felt strong and progressive through a wide powerband, no doubt helped by the slick changing eight-speed automatic gearbox. Top speed is 143 mph, and zero to 62 mph takes just 5.7 seconds, so you can see it is true to Alfa's heritage and 'sports performance' is definitely on the menu. Officially this engine will return 40.4 mpg in the Combined Cycle and during my week of test driving the real-life figure was 32.6 mpg which I was happy with. Not so pleasing though are the CO2 emissions of 161 g/km which pushes up tax costs. The VED road tax is £500 First Year rate and then £140 Standard rate but as this particular Stelvio costs more than £40k there is the £310 supplement to add to the Standard rate for five years. That all important company car Benefit-in-Kind tax rate is 31%. Insurance is group 36D.

## VERDICT

The amount of customers moving rightly or wrongly to SUV/Crossover style of vehicles is unprecedented in the history of motoring and it's taken Alfa Romeo a while to enter the fray. But now it has, it couldn't afford not to, and they have come up with the Stelvio which can be bought either as a 'head' or 'heart' decision, it's that sort of brand and that sort of model.

**For:** Distinctive exterior design with eye-catching kerb appeal, high specification, comprehensive safety equipment, strong petrol engine, sharp handling, fun to drive.

**Against:** Poor rear and rear quarter visibility, high taxes, ill-fitting fuel filler flap, very firm ride.



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Milestones and Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Alfa Romeo Stelvio Milano Edizione 2.0 petrol 280 hp Q4 AWD automatic.

Price: £45,390.

Engine/transmission: 2.0 litre, four cylinder turbocharged petrol, 280 hp, 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) of torque at 2,250 rpm, eight speed automatic with Q4 AWD.



Performance: 143 mph, 0-62 mph 5.7 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 40.4 mpg (32.6 mpg on test).

Emissions and taxation: CO2 161 g/km, VED road tax £500 First Year rate then £140 Standard rate + £310 supplement each year for five years as the car costs over £40k, BiK company car tax 31%.

Insurance Group: 36D.

Warranty: Three years/unlimited mileage.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,687 mm (15.38 ft), W 1,903 mm (6.24 ft), H 1,671 mm (5.48 ft), boot/load space from 525 litres (18.54 cu.ft), braked towing weight 2,300 kg (5,071 ft), five doors/five seats.