Maserati Levante GranLusso – First Impressions

Published: June 15, 2019

Author: Chris Adamson

Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/maserati-levante-granlusso-first-impressions/



(Photos courtesy of Maserati).

No sector in the automotive marketplace has escaped the clutches of the Sports Utility Vehicle, not even the prestige brands, who at one time, would never have dreamed of having a chunky off-roader in their line-up.

One of the most recent converts (but not quite the last) is Maserati who by their own

admission are arriving rather late to the party – their offering is the high and mighty Levante.

Converting the traditional brand image of a luxury sportscar marque into a tall bulky SUV has been a difficult challenge for everyone who has attempted it so far and, for me, none has yet to fully achieve this, not even Maserati.



The end result always looks and feels either completely alien to the marque or else it appears as a sportscar on steroids although Maserati seems to have done better than many of its rivals.

At a quick glance, yes, there is enough Maserati DNA thanks to the distinctive grille shape (paying homage to the likes of the Tipo 60 Birdcage) with its prominent trident set with

vertically slats, the feline eyes of the headlights, even the slope of the bonnet and rear pillar chimes with the likes of the Quattroporte.



But, elsewhere the demands of functionality (such as the extended rear haunches) blur the image and you are left with an imposing and substantial piece of machinery that could have come from one of several design studios.

It’s much the same inside where features such as the centrally located oval analogue clock tells you which brand it represents without the trident badge to give it away.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Maserati’s reputation for making comfortable rather than blisteringly quick sportscars and

saloons means that they can do a luxurious cabin better than most and the combination of quality materials; fixtures and fittings shines through – somehow being in the Levante makes you feel pampered.

Extremely comfortable and cosseting 12 way adjustable heated front seats are swathed in stitched leather and Zegna silk (red, however, would not have been my choice) while the black piano trim and metallic touches add a touch of style and sophistication.

The comprehensive dashboard is focused on a centrally mounted 8.4 inch touch control display which for 2019 features updated graphics and improved air conditioning features. This is supplemented by large clear circular instrumentation behind the chunky steering wheel.

The central console houses a tactile gear lever and a revised button cluster including the variable air suspension set-up switch.

Leaving the likes of Ferrari and Porsche to do two-plus-two cabins Maserati has always been quite generous to its occupants in terms of accommodation and the Levante is no different; the rear seats offer plenty of leg and shoulder room for three occupants with lots of lateral support for the heated outer seats.

Behind the powered tailgate is a versatile load space that swallows 580 litres or 20.48 cu.ft (the obligatory set of golf clubs fitting in with no trouble) or can be enlarged to a competitive 1,625 litres or 57.39 cu.ft with the60/40 split rear seats folded.

In the GranLusso trim as tested the Levante is stacked out with lots of luxury goodies such as four zone climate control, rear privacy glass and adaptive cruise control, while the options list features include a Bowers and Wilkins Premium Surround sound system and a rear parking camera.



On the Road



While many of its competitors have opted for V8s and even V12s Maserati's speciality has often been in engineering sturdy V6 power plants and this is the case for the version in which I was behind the wheel.

The 3 litre unit with its inertia parallel twin turbos pushes out a lively 350 bhp in a sustained and linear progression through the eight-speed ZF automatic transmission.



Described as the entry level power unit this is still good for 60 mph in six seconds and a top speed in excess of 150 mph.

There is enough torque on tap (most delivered below 2,000 rpm) to punch away from standstill without much effort or aggression – perhaps the sheer refinement of the delivery is a slight disappointment as heritage would demand a slightly raw edge to be a classic Maserati.

However, I am not going to complain because customers for the Levante will more than likely have something a little more sporting tucked away in a garage.

The auto stop-start assists on fuel consumption but you are still going to struggle to get above 23 mpg and emissions at 278 g/km mean there is going to be a road tax penalty to pay.

The off-road looks aren't all for show. The Levante is equipped with a Q4 Intelligent All-Wheels Drive system based on an electronically controlled multi-plate wet clutch that has been developed to deliver rear wheel driving characteristics – 100 per cent of power going the rear in normal conditions so there is always a touch of oversteer.

On loose surfaces the system can instantly split the power equally front and rear without the drive having to do anything. This is supported by a limited-slip differential at the rear axle to optimise available traction should you need it.

While I had no opportunity to test this out, the reassurance that it is there allows you to press on through tight twisting corners; the encouragement to do this supported by an electric power steering set-up that promises quick responses but doesn't always fully deliver.

With the suspension geometry derived from the Ghibli you know the Levante is going to be firmly planted on the road with a multi-link five arm rear layout giving lots of flexibility to respond to vertical and lateral movements, creating less body roll than you might expect from a vehicle of this size.



Standard fit closed system independent air-suspension makes for a surprisingly comfortable and responsive ride quality, more luxury limo than high performance SUV.

Behind the scenes are a plethora of technology to make the Levante secure and predictable: Maserati Stability Programme, an Advanced Driver Assistance package (with features such as lane keeping assist, active blind spot assist and traffic sign recognition), Forward Collision Warning and Hill Descent Control.



VERDICT

Levante has just enough character to single it out from its rivals, especially when it comes to the cabin ambience, but what could be its biggest selling point is its price.

All the luxury, technology and sophistication listed comes at less than £70,000 which undercuts most of its rivals by some margin and the Maserati has always been the outsider in the prestige sector.



Wheels-Alive Tech. Spec. in Brief:

Maserati Levante GranLusso

Engine: 2979cc V6 twin-turbo petrol

Transmission: Eight-speed automatic

Power: 350 bhp @ 5,750 rpm

Torque: 500 Nm (369 lb.ft) @ 1,750 rpm

Performance:

0-62 mph: 6 seconds

Top Speed: 156 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Urban: 17.9 mpg

Extra-Urban: 28.8 mpg

Combined: 23.5 mpg

CO2 Emissions: 278 g/km

Price (On the Road): £69,490