

CLASSIC DRIVER

Italy comes along for every ride with the Maserati Levante Modena S

Lead

No matter where you travel with the Maserati Levante S - a touch of Italian elegance and grandeur comes with you everywhere. This was also the case on our recent road trip to the Engadine.



It's one of those things with modern luxury SUVs: they offer sportiness, safety, plenty of space and all the comfort, they conquer the dirt road to the dream beach, as well as the snow-covered path to the chalet. In short, they are the perfect touring cars – and that's exactly what makes them so successful. But at least for friends of classic car culture, there is always a drop of bitterness: Most of them are so oversized, opulent, and pompous that you are almost a little ashamed to roll through remote mountain villages at their wheel. Especially in Switzerland, where understatement is already taught in preschool, the off-road flagships from Aston Martin and Bentley (not to mention Ferrari and Lamborghini) are sometimes a bit too thick hip to really enjoy.



We were all the more pleased when we received the keys to the Maserati Levante Modena S a few weeks ago: the elegant paint shade "Verde Royale" was reminiscent of a Sicilian mint sorbet, while the interior seemed to be dipped in dark chocolate – and the braided pattern of the seats could also have come from Bottega Veneta's autumn-winter collection. The design language – initiated by design legend Lorenzo Ramaciotti and sharpened and perfected by his extremely talented successor Klaus Busse – also works surprisingly well: the Levante looks sporty without appearing brash or aggressive. The silhouette is sweeping and elegant, not overloaded with unnecessary ornamentation, and makes you forget what a big car is actually standing in front of you. Today, Maserati seems to be a last haven of restrained, timeless northern Italian elegance in automotive design.



The next moment of happiness follows the turning of the ignition key – because the 3-litre six-cylinder sounds surprisingly sonorous, powerful, and authentic. The Levante Modena S brings 430 hp and 580 Nm to the road via all-wheel drive. Compared to the 330 hp and 450 NM Levante GT and the upgraded Levante Trofeo with 580 hp and 730 Nm Ferrari V8, our model seems to be the golden mean. But this can be checked better on Graubünden pass roads than in Zurich city traffic. So, we throw the weekenders into the spacious trunk and start our journey towards the Engadine.



While we are still gliding along in comfort mode on the motorway, we activate sport mode at the foot of the Albula Pass – and the Maserati immediately changes its character. The suspension becomes sportier, the exhaust roars like a veritable sports car. So, roll down the windows and let the cool mountain air blow around your nose and follow the deserted serpentine on the ideal line. With this agility, you almost forget that you are steering the top SUV model from Modena, which weighs just over two tonnes, towards the top of the pass – and not the GranTurismo. You don't need more horsepower. The eight-speed gearbox alone could sometimes shift up a little more quickly. And after a few days on the road, you wish you could activate the sport mode even without a growling soundtrack. But as Klaus Busse tells us when we run into him later in the weekend: Most customers prefer the sound effects without the tight suspension. So there has to be a bit of drama.



But as soon as we get into the mood, the 18-hairpin bends of the Albula Pass are already behind us. For today, the sporting activity is enough for us, and so we roll under azure blue skies through deep dark spruce forests and along sparkling mountain lakes in the direction of St Moritz. Our royal green Maserati Levante bears its hometown in its name, but up here, in the unique light of the Engadine, colours and shapes really come into their own. St. Moritz and the Engadine are a popular weekend destination not only for Zurich, but also for Milan – and the Italian style icons have brought much of its style to the Graubünden mountains.



Our next stop is the arrival at Suvretta House, the alpine Grand Hotel is an institution of timeless elegance – and our favourite destination for a weekend in the Graubünden mountains in summer and winter. Also in the arrivals area, where the liveried Poitier happily receives the keys, our green Maserati makes a "Bella Figura" as expected. By the way, we are not greeted with an Allegra or Grüezi, but a nonchalant Buongiorno. Is this already the Modena effect?



The next day we go back on the open road – first a detour to the Maloja Pass, which winds in spectacular serpentine towards Bregaglia and Italy. This is followed by the round trip over the Julier and Albula passes. And finally we go over to the wonderful Bernina Pass, which we last experienced together with Aloisa Ruf in ice and snow. The Maserati is fast, sporty, confident. And yet as comfortable as you would expect from a Maserati. Before returning home over the Flüela Pass, a last coffee stop at the Meyers Manx Cafe at the valley station of Muottas Muragl, the meeting place of the Engadine car scene. With a double espresso, you look at the Maserati at the pump almost wistfully: Who will bring a little Italianità into our lives in the future if not this Levante Modena S in "Verde Royale"?



Next year, Maserati will celebrate its 110th anniversary. And depending on personal preference, the new cars will have to be measured against the myth of the pre-war sports cars, the iconic GTs of the 1960s or the charismatic edge wedges of the 1970s and 1980s. And of course, Maserati disciples will argue, there is little in-house engineering under the shell today and a lot of technology from the pool of the Stellantis sister companies. Nevertheless, the Maserati Levante Modena S is a convincing car that maintains an almost serene calm in the automotive world, which is increasingly polarized between hyper-luxury and electric autonomy. It's a car that you automatically glance over your shoulder after getting out of the car and that you look forward to at breakfast in the morning, when the trident on the key promises a sporty day behind the wheel.

Photos: Elliot Newton

Gallery

