

FOR OUR DEBUT automotive review column highlighting cars and watches I could think of no better pairing than Blancpain and Lamborghini.

Allied since 2008, the two brands have formed a dynamic partnership. The relationship is a story worth telling. But first we put you in the car most emblematic of the pairing—the Lamborghini Gallardo LP550-2.

Introduced for 2011, the LP550-2 Bicolore builds on the success of the best-selling model in Lamborghini history. More than 10,000 examples of the Gallardo have sold since 2004—huge numbers for a supercar.

The LP550-2 designation denotes one of the Bicolore's two unique features. This is a rear-wheel-drive Gallardo, a follow-up to the popular limited edition (just 250 produced) LP550-2 "Valentino Balboni" Gallardo which debuted in 2009. "Bicolore" is basically Italian for two-tone, combining Noctis Black from the beltline up and one of five standard colors from the beltline down.

Ours arrived in Arancio Borealis, a smoldering orange hue that gives the Bicolore as much visual shout as the aural wail from the 542 hp, 5.2 liter V10 under its transparent engine cover. Every Lamborghini is designed to offer a kind of sensory overload and the Bicolore delivers.

Floor it as you would leaving the pits in a Blancpain Endurance Series race and the LP550-2 reaches 60 mph in just 3.5 seconds on the way to a 199 mph top speed. Power is delivered through a six-speed automated manual gearbox which cracks off crisp shifts, producing an angry symphony that is addictive. Braking is ferocious and consistent.

Grip and handling are abundant although the two-wheel drive Bicolore feels slightly less planted and exhibits more understeer than the standard all-wheel-drive variants. On the street, where the LP-550-2 is a rolling celebrity, this matters less but the car is edgier than its stablemates, demanding greater attention and skill to drive at the limit.

Some drivers might find that disconcerting, but in a world where even supercars are made increasingly "safe," I find the LP550-2's slightly nervous temperament more exciting, more like dancing with the breed of bull the Gallardo is named for.

That's appropriate given that the Gallardo is the basic platform for the rear-wheel-drive GT race cars Lamborghini campaigns around the world. Unlike the racing version however, the LP550-2 coddles its driver. Premium Nero Persus hide leather stitched in the same color as the exterior paint abounds. Driver-focused instruments, adjustable settings for suspension and throttle modulation, and all that leather make the cabin a nice place to do the business of supercar piloting. Though it gives up a small amount of performance in terms of power and ultimate grip to its all-wheel-drive brothers, the LP-550-2 may be the most exciting Gallardo in Lamborghini's bullring.

BLANCPAIN & LAMBORGHINI

GLANCE AT THE WRIST of Lamborghini CEO Stephan Winkelmann and you'll find a Blancpain 50 Fathoms, a symbol of the partnership Winkelmann and Blancpain CEO, Marc A. Hayek, began almost four years ago.

The relationship has propelled Blancpain-backed



CAR:

Base Price: \$196,995
Engine — 542 hp 5.2 Liter V10
Transmission — 6-speed auto-clutch manual
Curb Weight — 3200 pounds
Fuel Economy — 13 mpg city/20 mpg highway

WATCH:

Price: \$22,000
Movement — Calibre F185, Automatic self-winding,
 Flyback Chronograph
Dial — Black, carbon fiber
Case — 43.5 mm, titanium
Strap — Fabric, satin; sail canvas strap

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Lamborghini Gallardos and Murcielagos into a racing series around Europe and beyond — some of them with Blancpain's adventurous CEO at the wheel. It has also allowed the Lamborghini Blancpain Super Trofeo race series to flourish as the fastest one-make GT series in the world. So successful is the formula that Lamborghini and Blancpain recently announced a renewal and expansion of the Super Trofeo Series.

“Marc Hayek and the Blancpain team's focus on precision and performance matches Lamborghini's,” Winkelmann says. “These ideals have proven to be a natural fit and, as a result, we have announced an additional two seasons for the Super Trofeo in both Europe and China.”

Such is Marc Hayek's passion for racing that he has committed himself and his brand to it. After multiple wins in the Super Trofeo Series in 2010, Hayek advanced to the GT3 category for 2011. In just his third year of racing, he claimed the Amateur title in the highly competitive German ADAC GT Masters series along with Blancpain Reiter Engineering co-driver, Peter Kox.

Hayek also shared a Reiter Engineering Gallardo LP600+ with Kox in the newly-launched Blancpain Endurance Series. In addition, Blancpain served again as the Official Timer of the 2011 FIA GT1 World Series.

To date, the partnership has yielded one racing-specific timepiece, the L-EVOLUTION Super Trofeo Chronograph. Stay tuned for more. ⌚

