

TEST DRIVE: MASERATI GHIBLI S Q4

CENTURION takes Maserati's 2014 sedan on a pilgrimage

Jan Tegler
20 August 2014



2014 marks the 100th anniversary of a storied Italian marque founded by the Maserati brothers – Alfieri, Ernesto, Ettore and Bindo – and the introduction of the new Ghibli, a luxury performance sedan based on the maker's larger Quattroporte sedan. Notable for its arrival in a segment dominated by German sedans and blessed with the brand's marvelous heritage, the Ghibli exudes exclusivity.

With that in mind, we buckled into the 410 horsepower, all-wheel-drive S Q4 variant of the four-door to get a feel for this modern Maserati and to make a kind of pilgrimage. Pointing the car's classic oval grille toward Philadelphia, we set off from Baltimore for the terrific Simeone Automotive Museum where one of the Ghibli's celebrated ancestors resides – a 1956 300S. One of 28 examples built between 1955 and 1958 to compete in the FIA World Sportscar Championship, the 300S finished the season second in 1956.

The new Ghibli's mission is much different, crafted as part of an expanded product line to aid Maserati in its goal of tripling sales globally by 2015. But apart from its status as the only Italian car on offer (aside from the Quattroporte) for upmarket sports sedan buyers, what

INSIDER KNOWLEDGE



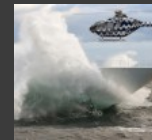
I once had to design a dining room table 'strong enough to dance an Irish jig upon' ... That was quite an unusual brief!

David Linley - bespoke furniture designer

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CONTRIBUTORS



ANDREW WRIGHT

Avid motoring-writer, living the dream in the Peak District

distinguishes it?

Styling was the hallmark of the original Ghibli released in 1967 by Maserati featuring a low-slung body with a shark-shaped nose penned by Giorgetto Giugiaro. That car was a hit with the public, exhibiting the exuberant style for which the best Italian cars are known. Initially, we weren't taken with new Ghibli's form. Echoing both the current Quattroporte and the original Ghibli's cab-rearward design, the new car's profile nonetheless seemed too similar to other contemporary sedans.

However, almost as soon as we left the driveway, pedestrians and other drivers started gawking. Yes, Maserati's famed (and large) Trident badges adorning the grille and C-pillars are striking advertisements for this sizeable four-door, but after seeing the car in motion from outside, we, too, began to appreciate its hippy contours. The Ghibli may not be as glamorous as other Italians, but it's no introvert.



The S Q4 certainly has expressive performance. Refreshingly undisguised by plastic shrouding, the twin-turbocharged 3.0 litre V6 under the Ghibli's broad bonnet produces 550 Nm of torque to aid its 400-plus horsepower in propelling the 1,870 kilogram tourer to 100 km/h in 4.8 seconds. Machined and assembled in Maranello with Ferrari-cast heads, the engine funnels power through an eight-speed automatic.

Take command of the transmission mission via the large plastic paddles behind the steering wheel while mashing the gas, and you're rewarded with quick upshifts and impressive response accompanied by fantastic sound from the V6. But with the transmission in automatic mode, the drivetrain sometimes stumbles, lacking power when called for until the gearbox downshifts and boost builds. Selecting 'Sport' mode helps, but in normal motoring the Ghibli is occasionally caught napping.

Find a twisting section of road, however, and the sedan wakes up nicely. Recognising the brand's racing tradition, Maserati has given the Ghibli a sporting setup. Working in concert with the Q4 all-wheel-drive system, the suspension provides great handling, easily surpassing some of the Ghibli's more powerful German competition. Steering feel is superior, courtesy



CORNELIA MARIOGLOU

Cruising and writing about all things water-based



JOHN MCNAMARA

Seasoned travel writer and destination connoisseur



ARIEL ADAMS

Watch lover and aficionado of all things timekeeping

of an old-school hydraulic system.



The interior, swathed in leather and high-gloss Ebano wood trim, is comfortable and Italian-chic, but less characterful than other recent Maseratis. An example is the bargain-basement infotainment system the Ghibli shares with a variety of lesser Fiat-Chrysler models.

But standing in close proximity to its 300S forebear, the Ghibli is clearly a modern member of the Maserati family – a new model worthy of transporting one on a pilgrimage.

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