

MASERATI GRANCABRIO

Motoring expert Tim Barnes-Clay rides his emotions in the GranCabrio from Maserati



Some say that cars are nothing special – they’re only for getting from A to B in. That’s true in a way, but that’s like saying any old home will do as long as it has a roof, bricks, windows and a door.

The Maserati GranCabrio is definitely something different – and special. Getting behind its wheel for a week is like moving from your bungalow in Birmingham to a villa in Valencia for seven days.

So why is the GranCabrio so extraordinary? Well, it’s a Maserati in the purest sense of the word and it’s a car with high emotional appeal – from its luscious looks and Pininfarina styling to the V8 engine’s thrilling sound and amazing performance.

On the outside, the open top Italian sports car’s headlights extend horizontally and blend perfectly into the contours of the nose

section, while the centrepiece of the oval grille is Maserati’s legendary Trident symbol in chrome. The dynamism of the front profile is accentuated by the short overhang and the long bonnet, with three chromed air intakes adorning the front wings in classic Maserati style.

The side panels are embellished with eye-catching chrome detailing at the top, which is echoed at the bottom with specially sculpted fairings that also pick up the light with dramatic effect. The attractive outline is then finished off in style by the car’s impressive 20-inch Trident design alloy wheels which fit tightly into the wide wheel-arches, creating a powerful stance and a statement about the car’s performance potential.

The rear end of the Maserati emphasises its sporty, high-tech character, with triangular taillights that use 96 LEDs to ensure maximum night-time visibility, and a wide, aerodynamic

rear valence is framed at the sides by two pairs of large diameter chrome exhaust tailpipes.

Inside, the GranCabrio boasts a uniquely sophisticated combination of modernity, elegance, craftsmanship, sportiness and luxury. All the materials are in leather and wood and the dashboard is both striking and pleasing to the eye. All-around attention to detail manifests itself in numerous features, such as the subtle chrome inlay that decorates the buttons on the dashboard and steering wheel, the Trident emblem that’s hand-crafted on the seat head-restraints, the Alcantara trim that lines the back of the gearchange paddles, and the prominent hand-stitching of the front and rear armrests.

The driver’s controls are located to give a feeling of total command: the major dynamic functions are controlled by buttons on the driver’s side, whilst the most commonly used multimedia controls can be operated via



those on the steering wheel. The functions are then displayed on the seven-inch screen of the Maserati Multi Media System, which is mounted in the centre of the dashboard.

One of the best things about the GranCabrio is that it is a four-seater, which allows you and three others (admittedly, the two passengers in the back have to be pretty small) to enjoy the experience of driving with the top down. The roof can be opened in just 28 seconds and it puts on show all of the Maserati's flowing, handcrafted, interior beauty. Of course, the UK

is never without rain for long, so if a sudden downpour occurs while driving, there is no need to stop. At speeds of 18 mph or below, you simply hold a button down for a few seconds and the roof then closes, protecting everyone from the rain and wind.

Of course, the Maserati sounds as good as you might expect. Better, in fact. That's because, controlled by pneumatic valves, the GranCabrio's exhaust system has two distinct characters – discreet and inspiring. In 'Normal' mode the valves are closed to ensure a low,

discreet sound level. However, pressing the 'Sport' button not only changes the car's performance and handling dynamics but also opens the exhaust valves, thus enabling the engine to deliver maximum power with a smile-inducing growl. The exhaust valve bypass is controlled by a governor so that it only opens above 3,000 revs in 'Sport' mode for an unforgettable driving experience.

At the heart of all this throbs the most powerful of the Italian car-maker's engines – the glorious 4.7 litre V8, delivering 434 bhp. For truly responsive drivability, 82 percent of maximum torque is available from as low as 2,500 rpm, ensuring exceptional pick-up even in higher gears, so that overtaking is safer and driving in general is more enjoyable and sporty. The car can accelerate to 62 mph in just 5.3 seconds and reach a top speed of 175 mph, where permitted.

Matching a six-speed automatic gearbox to its lump of an engine, Maserati has created a combination which will impress the most demanding drivers with its acceleration, whilst still delivering smooth and fluid gearchanges – for the comfort of all onboard. But what makes the Maserati GranCabrio such fun to drive, highly responsive and particularly safe, is its well balanced weight distribution. With the top up, 49 percent of the car's weight is carried by the front wheels and 51 percent by the rear wheels. When the roof is lowered, the weight shifts just a little to the rear and the respective figures are 48 percent and 52 percent.

Like its GranTurismo sister, the GranCabrio's



near-perfect balance has been achieved by positioning the engine behind the front axle. 'Perfect' balance means that everyday driving becomes uncomplicated, predictable, easy and enjoyable, and traction is maximised when accelerating. Road-holding is improved, too, with the car remaining exceptionally stable and well balanced even during emergency manoeuvres.

The motor is also packed with safety aids. Technology includes Bi-Xenon headlights, which are enhanced by a swivel function that

improves the illumination of the road at night; an electronic stability programme; dual-stage airbags for the driver and front passenger and a telescopic roll-over bar system.

The Maserati GranCabrio is indeed a car to behold. Yes, it will get you from A to B like any other car – but, believe me, you won't want to stop at B once you get in the driver's seat, drop the roof, gun the engine and hear the crackling roar of the V8.



FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 175 mph
- 0-62 mph: 5.3 secs
- Combined mpg: 18.3
- Engine: 4691 cc V8 petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 434 at 7000 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 360 at 4750 rpm
- CO2: 358 g/km
- Price: £98,250 on the road