

CLASSIC DRIVER

Driven: Lamborghini Gallardo LP 570-4 Superleggera



There's a first time for everything. Why it had taken me so long to get behind the wheel of a Lamborghini, I don't know. Once settled into the Alcantara lightweight sports seats, however, it was a desperately difficult job to get out again.

It's not because it's ergonomically challenging – far from it. It's just that the **Gallardo**, in **LP 570-4 Superleggera** guise, is as exhilarating and surprising a car as you could imagine, and relinquishing the key is a tough job. Let me explain why.

As the **Ithaca Green** coupé rolled off the transporter it didn't, to be honest, look quite as 'in-your-face' as I'd expected. It's a 'pointy' design, brilliantly executed, origami-like, even – but I wasn't expecting the level of angularity to extend to the seat squab which, as you can see from the photographs, has an upward 'peak' as if to underline the uncompromising nature of the car.

That said, once you've opened the carbonfibre-lined door that does feel *genuinely* light (but not flimsy), and settled into the one-position – with just fore and aft adjustment – seat, it does feel comfortable.



Comfortable, yet serious, because this, the fastest-ever, lighter-than-before (70kg less than the previous model **560-4 Gallardo**, is so capable, so powerful (570bhp at 8000rpm) that every single component has but one purpose: to provide a searingly fast driving experience like no other.

As with many mid-engined cars, the pedals are offset to the centre. The **LP 570-4** is equipped as standard with 'e-gear' electro-hydraulically operated gearbox (a conventional manual is also available at no extra cost), so there are only two pedals with the accelerator in the same axis as the steering column centreline. That takes a little getting used to, but once your left foot is comfortably placed on the footrest it soon becomes second-nature. A mile or so, I would say.

When the engine fires up, in '**Normal**', you're half expecting it to shake the leaves off the trees, sending bunnies back to their warrens lickety-split. It's not really like that, though; lustily powerful, yes, but not overtly blaring.





My first 'never-driven-a-Lamborghini-before' few hundred yards were accomplished in **Normal** (you also have '**Sport**' and '**Corsa**' for more extremes of engine and gearbox mapping), with the gearbox in '**Auto**'. Staid and sensible to many, it's a tried-and-tested procedure to get the hang of a new and potentially unwieldy car.

Within a very short space of time I was to appreciate that a) **Auto** is for wimps, b) **Sport** does everything so much better, it can only be for reasons of drive-by noise testing that it's not the default, and c) this 4390mm x 1900mm, speed-bump-scraping supercar is as wieldy and chuckable as a **MINI Cooper S**.

The visibility is remarkably good. No, I'm being serious, it really is. Okay, we had the optional 'large rear spoiler' fitted, which did fill the mirror a touch but, that apart, you can easily see out of the side windows

(Plexiglass, but still electrically operated) and soon get a sense of its extremities.



Underneath the Plexiglass engine-cover sits the heavily revised, *Iniezione Diretta Stratificata* (direct injection, to you and me) 5204cc V10. As a work of visual art, the motor is not as imposing as something from **Maranello**. However – and I write this not having experienced the similarly powerful **458 Italia** – dynamically it is the measure of anything.

There's no explosive punch of power as you'd find in an **F430**, nor is there the colossal wave of torque and effortless push demonstrated by a **Bentley Continental GT Speed**. Compared with a 12-cylinder **Ferrari 599 GTB**, it's sort of similar yet – with a 50bhp disparity compensated by a 200kg weight difference – it seems to pull with equal gusto.

Every tiny increment on the rev-counter signifies yet faster progress. The power delivery is utterly seamless, the power and torque curves so evenly matched that it's difficult to tell which is the predominant. I can understand recent reviewers' high praise of a less-powerful (525PS/517bhp) version of the same engine installed in the **Audi R8 V10** – you think the V8 is good but, my goodness, wait until you try this...







All that effortless oomph is transmitted to the road via 4wd and – when really pushing on – lightning-fast, ‘snap’ gearchanges via the e-gear. In **Auto** it is a little lumpy and bumpy – way off the excellent installations in **Ferraris** and **Maseratis** – but, given an **LP 570-4** on a clear road, the gearbox in **Sport** and a lot of throttle input, you’ll experience the most exciting motoring possible. The superlative handling does give a hard ride but it’s no worse than an **Aston Martin V12 Vantage** or **GT3 Porsche**. The price of performance.

One slight oddity is the behaviour when changing up mid-corner. At fairly full throttle, in fast sweeping corners, an up-change will cause the car to twitch along its diagonal axis. It must be caused by torque transfer as the clever diffs cope with 570bhp momentarily switched off and on again. An observation only; nothing to see, move on there please.

The grip from 4wd and the **235/35 ZR19** front, **295/30 ZR19** rear **Pirelli P Zero Corsas** on lightweight **Otto Fuchs** wheels is magnificent and, when the heavens opened as I drove the car back from a photography session, it was reassuring to travel with 570bhp a foot away from my left ear safe in the security of all-wheel drive.



Oh, and the wipers worked faultlessly, by the way. In fact it's hard to find quirks of design or finish on the car at all, and I can only offer a strangely placed **Reverse** button (to the right of the steering wheel, on the dash – why?), and a beautifully machined petrol filler cap that has nowhere to 'rest' during refuelling and can be tightened up without 'clicking'.

Er, that's about it. So much for the 'Italian supercar' clichés.

How about the "it's a car for special occasions, to clear the cobwebs and make you feel good" old chestnut? Too right! It is an utterly superb driver's car in which I'd love to spend more time and although it *would* put up with everyday driving, unlike a **599 GTB** (say) you wouldn't really want to use this to commute or tour.

With minimal storage space and ruinous thirst (it is, in fact, better than the **LP560-4** by some 20% in the

combined cycle but still 13.5 litre/km or 16mpg according to official figures) you aren't going on many long trips. The check-out girl at the local BP station loved it – she'll be seeing a lot more of it, after all.





Likewise, every England-flag-bearing white van man gave it the thumbs-up as I beat a steady cruise back to base. Respect.

And it's not just the performance and jaw-dropping looks. Every detail of the latest **Superleggera** is delightful; from the **Alcantara** door pulls to the extensive use of carbonfibre (which I don't normally like, much of it optional in our car) and well-thought-out instrumentation, it is an endlessly fascinating machine which reveals new angles, nooks and crannies with every examination.



Lamborghini worked closely with the **University of Washington** and the aircraft company **Boeing** to develop its carbonfibre programme. **Boeing's** new **Type 787 Dreamliner** (the world's first commercial aircraft built entirely from man-made composite material), like the **Gallardo Superleggera**, has also reduced its fuel consumption by a fifth.

Its cruising speed of 0.85 Mach is, on paper, a little quicker than the Italian car's but few earthbound vehicles can match the sheer, visceral pace of a **Gallardo LP 570-4 Superleggera**. It was worth the wait.

*The model tested was a **Lamborghini Gallardo LP 570-4 Superleggera** in **Verde Ithaca** with **Black Alcantara** seats, all stitching in contrasting **Verde Ulisse**. Price in the UK, as tested and on the road: £180,136.31.*

Optional extras fitted to this car included: navigation system; rear-view camera; LED light package; Interior Carbon Package; Travel Package; Superleggera wheel trims; carbon ceramic brakes; transparent engine cover; large rear spoiler; suede leather steering wheel; white side indicators; carbonfibre engine bay.

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