

CLASSIC DRIVER

Maserati Khamsin: Love-child of a French-Italian affair

Lead

One of the oddest driving experiences I've ever had was at the wheel of a Maserati Khamsin, that weird love-child born of the affair between Citroën and Maserati in the early 1970s...

As you might expect from two children of the same parents, the SM and Khamsin have identical blood running through their veins. That blood is called LHM (liquide hydraulique minerale), a fluid pressurised by an engine-driven pump and contained in a system of pipes. It's used to activate the Khamsin's brakes, clutch, power steering (and even the seat height adjustment), with the result that the lightest touch on any of these controls has a frighteningly huge effect.

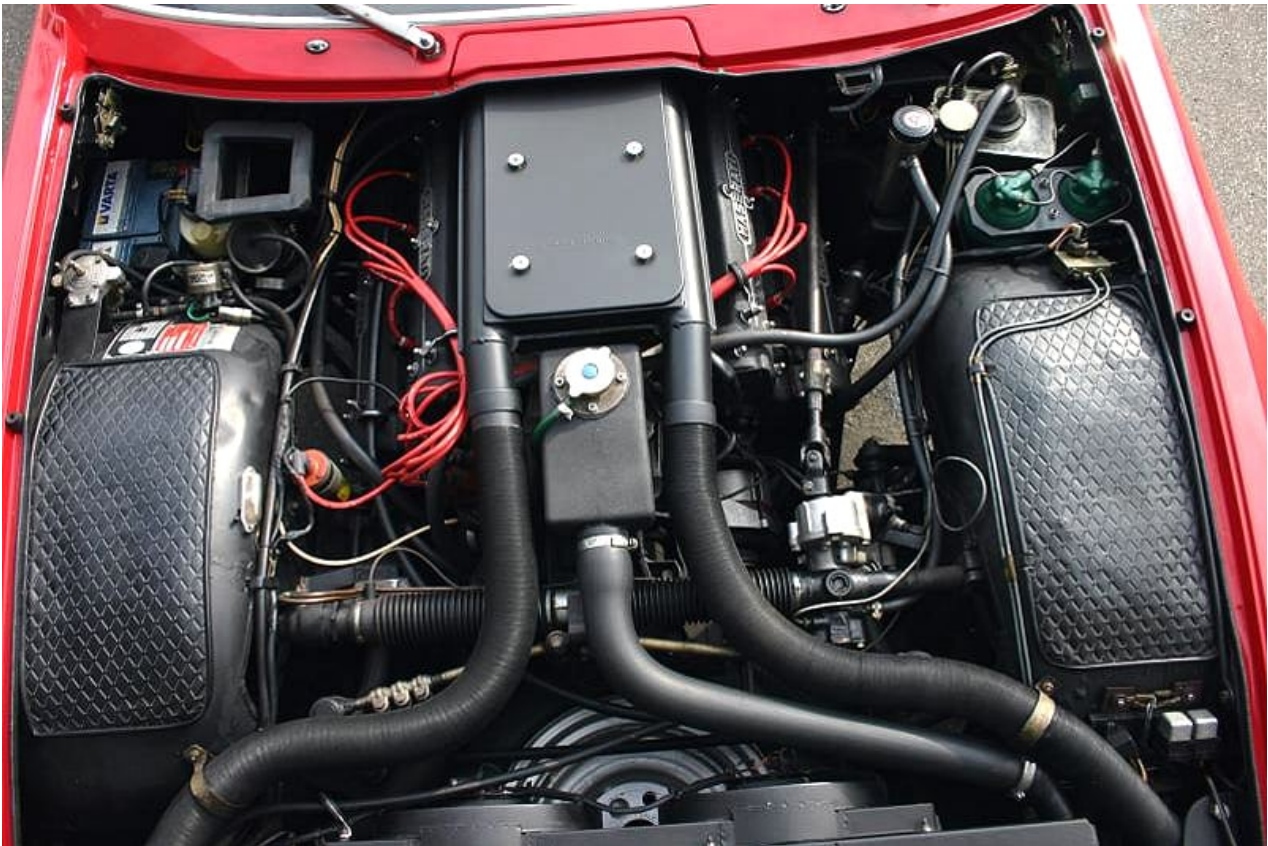
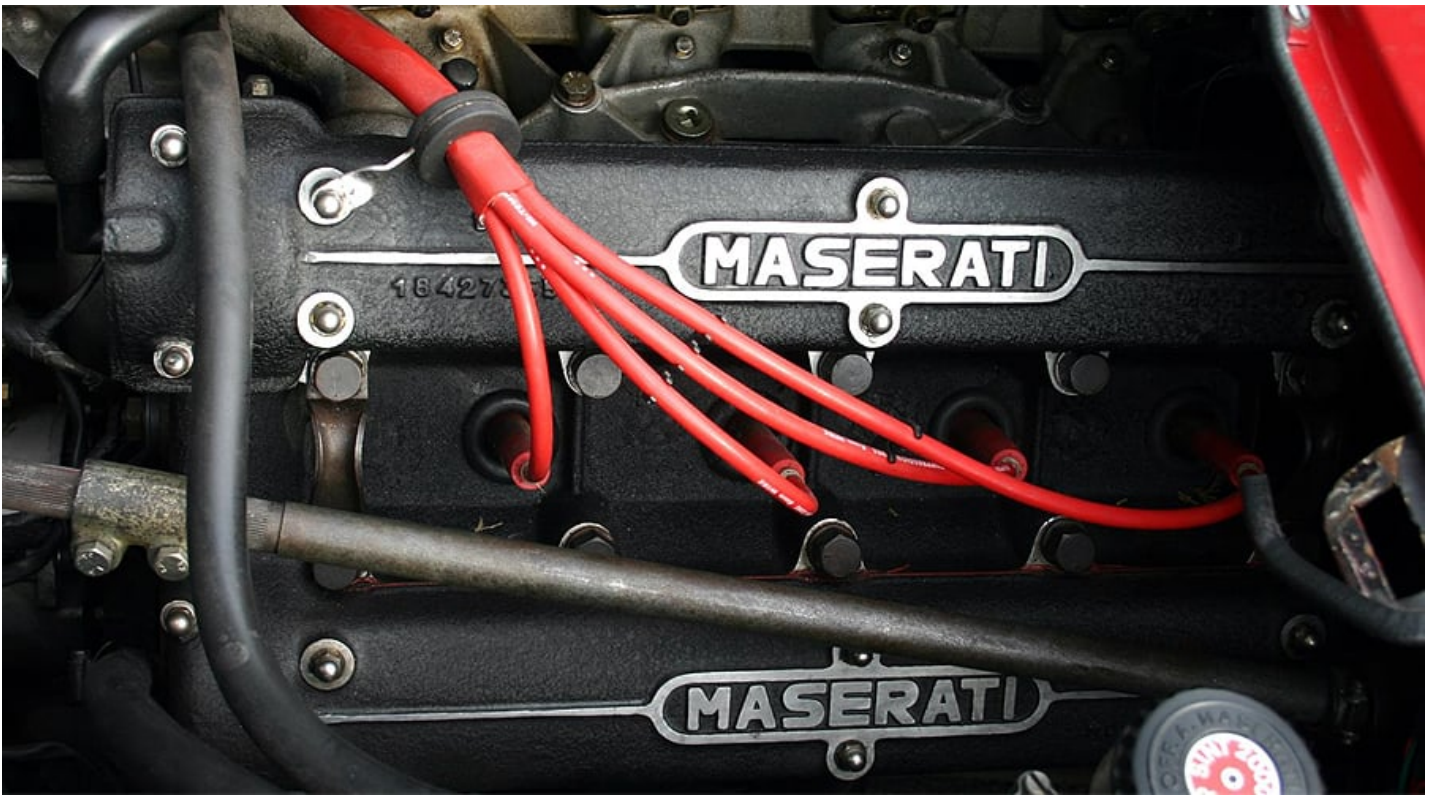
Rest your foot on the clutch, for example, and the pedal is sucked enthusiastically to the floor before you have a chance to feel it through the sole of your shoe. Caress the steering wheel and there you go, veering off in another direction, accompanied by a loud clonk from the hydraulic pressure regulator. Until you get used to it, there's a constant need to correct the direction in which you're heading, and as for the brakes - ha! If you so much as THINK about the brake pedal, you'll find the car is standing on its nose, while you dangle in the seatbelts contemplating the curiously baffling dashboard.





But beware: there's a health warning to accompany all this weirdness, because while the controls are eerily light once everything has warmed up, from a cold start nothing works at all. Not the brakes, not the steering, nothing. I remember the final words of a knowledgeable friend as I headed off on my first test-drive: "Oh, by the way, if the large, red STOP light comes on when you're driving, it means you've lost hydraulic pressure and probably have just about enough left to make one emergency stop before you lose all the controls."

Well, that's good then.





While the hydraulics are French, the Khamsin's engine and styling are pure Italian. The 4.9-litre front-mounted V8 develops a stunning 320bhp - this is a proper 1970s supercar - while the Bertone styling gives the weird creature a single, sweeping wedge of a body; but be careful what you keep in the boot. The car's defining design statement is a transparent tail that allows the occupants of the car behind to see every inch of your luggage, shopping, or whatever it is you choose to secrete behind the 2+2 seating.





In the Khamsin's eight-year production life (1974 to 1982) only around 430 cars were made. It was the last product of Citroën's ownership of Maserati, which ended in 1974, but this was no end-of-season bargain: in its day, the Khamsin cost significantly more than rival offerings from either Porsche or Ferrari. Today, its rarity, daring styling and sheer, hot-blooded performance surely make it a desirable addition to any collector's garage. Just don't forget to let it warm up before you drive off.

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The Maserati Khamsin Coupé seen in the pictures is currently being offered by German-based Classic Driver dealer [Movendi](#)

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