

CLASSIC DRIVER

[Going toe-to-toe with the Lamborghini LM 002 in the Italian hills](#)

Lead

Some cars act tough, while their persona doesn't live up to the driving experience. For Staff Editor Elliot Newton, flying to Lamborghini's homeland and getting behind the wheel of the brand's menacing LM 002 was a grudge match he hadn't prepared for, and one he isn't likely to ever forget...



Everywhere you look right now, an SUV lurks. Busy residential streets, secluded farmlands, even parked outside the world's finest hotels, it seems nowhere is safe from the influx of the lifted, rugged family hauler. While most opt for an efficient hybrid engine under the bonnet, even the world's most famous sports car brands can't escape the financial allure of an SUV and have each set out to build the finest in the game.

Porsche has the Cayenne, which arguably saved the brand back in 2002, although it was met with pitchforks and 'No Porsche No' protest boards as it seemed to destroy everything the brand stood for. The reality is Porsche knew exactly what they were doing: they built an exceptionally capable family SUV that not only looked like a Porsche, but was almost as exciting to drive as the latest 911 on offer, too. 2002 might seem like an awfully long time ago, but Lamborghini had already made their mark on the SUV world way back in 1986, laying the foundations for what the Urus would seek to become: not just an SUV, but a true work of art from that talented bunch in Bologna.



During the 1970s, Lamborghini were gaining huge notoriety thanks to the Countach, the pinnacle of their brand and the jewel of the supercar world. However, in a bizarre twist, the brand began working on a fiercely rugged utility vehicle destined for the US Army, dubbed the Cheetah. As a machine built to tackle virtually any terrain, it was certainly impressive off-road, but Lambo's engineers quickly realised its biggest flaw: the enormous rear engine and comical centre of gravity rendered it almost undrivable right from the get-go. With millions of HUMVEEs starting to arrive at military compounds around the US, Lamborghini canned the Cheetah, but the concept very much still lingered in the background.

At the dawn of the 1980s, a new design for a high-performance all-terrain Lamborghini began to take shape, under the vision of then-CEO, Guilio Alfieri. Known as the LM 001, this beefy off-roader was powered by an American-made V8, again mounted in the rear. Just like the Cheetah years before, the 001's pitfall would be the placement of the engine, where the distribution of weight and power would unsettle the car, making it extremely difficult to drive.



"Anteriore! Anteriore! Anteriore!" The chants would ring out and, finally, a concept was created with the engine mounted in the anteriore, or front in English. The bulky, lazy American V8 was replaced by Lambo's masterpiece, the L503 5.0-litre V12 from the Countach, now sitting front and centre, where it should have been all along. The monstrous engine was in, and the LMA (A for Anteriore) prototype was taking shape, with four-wheel independent suspension, self-locking differentials pushing 75% of power to the rear and the remaining to the front and a five-speed ZF transmission with low range, it was more than capable of traversing any terrain mother nature could throw at it.



And so, some 37 years after it was first introduced to the world, I am greeted by the menacing front lights of the LM 002 as it's carefully slotted into place alongside other priceless Lambos. This particular example is anything but subtle, finished in a rather famous motorsport-themed blue, with a sea of the finest white leather the 1980s had to offer inside. Dotted around the beast were stickers signalling the car's first owner, Leyton House Racing. Maybe the team thought if their lorry ran into some issues, the LM 002 could tow the trailer back to the factory?



Despite being high up in the hills of Zocca in Italy's delightful Emilia Romagna Region, famous for their rolling hills, twisty roads and fantastic sunsets, the weather was far more 4x4 friendly than supercar appropriate. As the LM 002 burbled on an increasingly slow idle, I climbed in and immediately noticed the utilitarian atmosphere, similar to that of a H1 Hummer. The LM 002's central column is so wide your arm can barely reach the passenger seat, while leather covers almost every surface that isn't already

claimed by aged wood trim. In all honesty, despite having recently hopped out of the last ever Miura that rolled off the assembly line, as well as a host of other rarer-than-rarer Lamborghini greats, the LM 002 was the car that scared me the most, and not just because of its menacing looks. Following behind its distant descendant, the Urus Performanté, one obstacle immediately caught my eye. The carburettor-hiding bonnet scoop was so large and intrusive, it meant right hand turns were taken almost blindly, where all of its 2,700kg weight would be transferred onto one side, pitching it skywards and pushing you back into the un-bolstered seats.



After a little more time behind the wheel, and once the pre-flight jitters had calmed somewhat, the reality of what this car really is began to sink in. Placed just inches away from my feet was Lamborghini's greatest achievement, a 60-degree V12 that was itching to let off some steam and one that only comes into its own at around 4,000 rpm, when your bravery often diminishes before the car's ability. At the time of launch, the LM 002 was the fastest off-roader in the world, good for 117 mph if you were brave enough. This sheer lunacy is exactly what Lamborghini stood for, and still stands for to this day. The ability to create a vehicle so outrageous, and yet justifiable and down-right popular is impressive, if nothing else. Moving to the present day, the same can be said about their current SUV, although the Urus Performante is a far more poised, refined and road-focused SUV than the LM. Its performance figures are eye-watering, faster to 60mph from a standstill than a Ferrari Enzo, Skyline R35 GTR and even Lambo's own Reventon.



Having been lucky enough to drive some of the brand's rarest creations, none etched themselves into my memories quite like the LM 002 managed to. As it swayed from left to right on the narrow Italian back roads, it gave me some time to understand why this car is such an iconic machine. Perhaps it's not because of its performance or questionable handling, but more the fame it garnered over its short, six-year lifespan. Only 301 examples were produced, many of which would be snapped up by celebrities and royalty alike, from King Hassan of Morocco to F1 World Champ Keke Rosberg and, of course, Rambo himself, Sylvester Stallone. These cars were icons, driven by icons. This perhaps goes without saying, but if you're ever offered the chance to get behind the wheel of one of Lamborghini's weirdest and yet most charming creations, my advice would be to grab the wheel and hold on!

Photos by Federico Vecchio

Gallery

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