

## Sexy, sporty Italian utilitarian

Alfa Romeo expands its brand presence by entering the hot compact crossover segment—with, as always, its sexy Italian bloodlines built in. By Joe Sage

### SPECIFICATIONS

<b>FORMAT / DRIVE</b> .....	5-passenger midsize SUV / AWD
<b>ENGINE</b> .....	all-aluminum 2.0L turbo 16v DI 4-cylinder
<b>HP/TORQUE</b> .....	280 hp / 306 lb-ft
<b>TRANSMISSION</b> .....	8-speed turbo automatic
<b>SUSPENSION</b> .....	F: double wishbone, semi-virtual axis R: patented Alfa Link with vertical rod link
<b>STEERING</b> .....	rack & pinion w variable electric assist
<b>BRAKES</b> .....	F: 13.0 Brembo 4-piston / R: 12.5 single-piston
<b>WHEELS/TIRES</b> .....	20x8.5 sport alum / 255/45R20 Conti AS
<b>LENGTH/WB/GRND CLEAR</b> .....	184.6" / 111" / 8.1"
<b>LEGROOM</b> .....	(F/R): 36.6" / 31.9"
<b>WEIGHT</b> .....	4044 lb
<b>TOW CAPACITY</b> .....	3000 lb
<b>FUEL CAPACITY</b> .....	16.9 gal
<b>MPG</b> .....	22/28/24 (city/hwy/comb)
<b>FACTORY</b> .....	Cassino, Italy
<b>BASE PRICE</b> .....	<b>\$46,495</b>
<b>OPTIONS:</b>	Driver assistance static package (650), driver assistance dynamic package (1500), 8.8" display w 3D nav (950), Harman Kardon premium audio (900), dual-pane sunroof (1350), compact spare (450), convenience package (200), Vulcano Black Metallic (600), aluminum interior trim (nc), gloss red calipers w white Alfa Romeo script (nc) .....
<b>DESTINATION CHARGE</b> .....	995
<b>TOTAL</b> .....	<b>\$54,090</b>

The Alfa Romeo Stelvio broadens the brand's US lineup, which since 2014 had consisted of the extremely sporty Alfa Romeo 4C, then the 4C Spider, followed by the 2017 Giulia sedan—which, in Quadrifoglio performance form, won as Performance Sedan and overall Car of the Year at the recent Texas Auto Roundup, held at Circuit of the Americas (see our July/August issue). Stelvio competes in the hottest segment today: the compact crossover. Built on the same platform as Giulia, it shares a subjective trait: as categories increasingly shift and overlap, both are classified as compacts but feel much like midsize from the pilot's seat. Stelvio delivers aspects of a sport sedan experience and a crossover, both—covering all bases, each with no compromise.

From outside, there is no mistaking Alfa Romeo Stelvio's segment niche, nor its sexy Italian bloodlines, drawing attention, admiration and lust. From its trademark nose and Milano-flag-Visconti-dragon badge, to its sculpted aluminum alloy wheels

(20-inchers on our Ti Sport) and Alfa-scripted red brake calipers, to a huge pair of chrome-tipped exhausts, Stelvio delivers that uniquely Alfa Romeo mix of hormones, performance, value and utility.

Step inside and take a seat. Detail after detail spell Alfa—from its firmly bolstered (heated/ventilated) leather sport seats, to its monotone iteration of the badge on the wheel, to the performance-first satin aluminum shift paddles.

Models start with a base Stelvio at \$41,995 or a Stelvio Ti (with additional finishes and options, larger screen, upgraded seats) at \$43,995. There are Stelvio Sport and Stelvio Ti Sport models, as well as a luxury-oriented Stelvio Ti Lusso. A Performance Package for Ti and Ti Sport models adds mechanical limited slip differential, active suspension, larger wheels—and paddle shifters on the base Ti. Options are reasonably priced for a premium-luxe vehicle, as are the vehicles themselves.



Endearing quirks: the Alfa Romeo Stelvio's shift paddles are mounted on the column, so they may not always be where you need them in a turn (though they are huge, to make up for that). And the steering wheel contains the ignition button, so it's never quite in the same place twice.



All have the same turbocharged, intercooled, direct-injected 2.0-liter engine, 8-speed automatic, all-wheel drive and a 5.4-second 0-to-60 time.

Alfa has a lot of cool things flowing in its hot Italian blood. Instead of familiar normal-sport-eco modes, it has "DNA"—Dynamic, Normal and Advanced Efficiency (eco). Suspension calibration is also available. Since DNA is a three-position knob, we set it on Dynamic and mostly kept it there (on most vehicles, this is a single pushbutton that needs to be continually reset). We quickly learned to turn off auto stop/start (a bit more delayed than many) and parking sensor alarms (louder and more disciplinarian than most) via two tiny buttons at the lower left corner of the instrument panel.

Our best moments with the Stelvio were on the open road. Immediately upon delivery, we took it to a twisty, hilly two-lane outside the Valley, where we could really give the drive modes a good sampling and utilize the manumatic (paddles or shift lever) more. Appropriately to its sporting nature, the more aggressively we drove it, the more responsive the steering, gears, suspension and overall tuning felt. In Dynamic, the ride was very firm, with great road connectedness. Powerful shift blips and exhaust note provide the soundtrack. We drove in 3rd and 4th gears for most of this (out of eight), with the tach generally at 3500 to 4000, and had a very spirited drive. On the way back, we tried eco (AE) and forgot we were even in it—there is no apparent efficiency penalty in routine driving, making its 28 mpg rating realistic.

The electronic shifter requires your attention, as is currently common—pushing the lever forward toward "P" at the top will put you in reverse, as Park is actually a separate button, and until you get the lever's safety squeeze to be second nature, you won't be using this as a getaway car, as the jog from R to D will often leave you in N.

Our local driving involved a mix of automatic Drive, with which typical frontage road runs from standstill across four lanes to a freeway merge were powerful and smooth, and paddles, which were frankly irresistible when it was time to discreetly leave the rest of the pack in the dust as a light turned green.

The Alfa Romeo Stelvio competes on many levels. Its features and price range put it in the same league as several other premium-luxury crossovers, while its emotional quotient may make you think twice about exotics at twice the price.

And yes—there will also be an Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio, with a 505 hp twin-turbo V6. Details and timing will be announced before the end of this year. ■

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