

ENGINE
3-ltr
V6POWER
410
HPTORQUE
550
NM0-62MPH
5
SECSMAX SPEED
177
MPHCOST FROM
£65k
APPROXMASERATI
GHIBLI 3.0 V6 S

BELLISSIMA: Maserati makes some of the prettiest four-door saloons on the market, but the Ghibli still has an aggressive front end thanks to that gaping grill and its squinting headlights

MOTORS MASERATI

YEARNING TO DRIVE

The sleek lines of Maserati's Ghibli S are more than a match for the spectacular scenery of northern Ireland, finds **HANNAH SUMMERS**

BACK IN THE 1820s, the Bushmills Inn on the Antrim Coast was a rest-stop for weary travellers looking to nurse their saddle-sore behinds by glugging whiskey until the early hours. Not much has changed for visitors to the famed Northern Irish town, although, thankfully, one thing has. And that's my ride: a Ferrari-built twin-turbo V6 engine, cocooned inside a Maserati Ghibli S. My saddle? Soft, black Italian leather, with a subtle red stitch.

The classical trident badge deserves to find itself driven along a road of equal status, and that's why I'm here on the renowned Giant's Causeway coast, undisputedly one of the world's most scenic drives and a road heavily laced with epic, film-worthy coastline.

Though Maserati's history may stretch back just over 100 years – last year was a big one for the Italian marque – its newest model, the four-door Ghibli, is looking to the future. Designed in Modena, Italy, a town famous as the birthplace of supercars, Pavarotti and, er, that balsamic vinegar, the new saloon offers Maserati's first diesel engine (along with petrol options, of course), and embodies the brand's plan to increase sales figures with a luxury sport saloon that you just can't resist.

And irresistible it is. The first admiring glances come hours prior to our arrival at Bushmills – before I've even pressed the start button, in fact. The *bianco alpi* sheen (or 'pearlescent white paint job', if you're lingo-shy) sparkles brighter than Diana Ross's favourite frock, while the long, low nose and dominating grill adds elegance with a hint of menace – a nod to the stylish GranTurismo, and classic 1950s A6 GCS. It also takes a fair slice of inspiration from the iconic 1960s Maserati Birdcage – "Don't mess with me," it teases. Easier said than done.

The Ghibli is a whole metre shorter than the Quattroporte, its handsome big brother – and it feels more nimble as a result. Its looks are just as alluring, with a snip more edge.

Crawling through Belfast traffic, the automatic gearbox – standard with the Ghibli – makes for a slog-free ride, while potholes are glided over in comfort. Finally, out on the

Antrim coast, my V6S model (no diesel for me, thanks) easily negotiates sweeping bends of tarmac backed by rugged, sheer cliffs on one side and frothy, green waves on the other. Following the signs for the 'scenic route' (or the *even more* scenic route – the views are *insane*), the Ghibli climbs narrow, 20%-incline country roads designed for tractors without a puff of effort. It's surprisingly torquey for a car with a relatively restrained three litres.

Heading west towards Ballymoney, wide country lanes demand the sport button – press it and the car's heckles are raised – and like a startled deer, it leaps into action. Reaching 62mph in five seconds, and with a top speed of 177mph, the Ghibli begs you to drive fast.

Indeed, that's where it seems to be most at ease. Inside, the elegant gearshift paddles on the high powered S-spec model are ideally positioned, meaning that if you do want to floor it like a pimply teen on the Staines bypass, you're well placed to do so.

It's not without a safety conscience, though: the active speed limiter function allows you to set a maximum mph to prevent accidental overexcitement, while the sat-nav is positioned in the instrument binnacle in front of you, and on the 8.4-inch touch screen to your side.

Elsewhere, the interior is as luxe as you'd hope. First of all, there's space. Oodles of it. Blanketed in soft leather – which comes as standard in the Ghibli S – the interior can be tailor-made, Ferrari style, depending on your preferences. (Mine's red, of course.)

There's also an option of a 1,280W Bowers & Wilkins audio system, providing an audio ▶

FF
If you do want to floor the Maserati like a pimply teen on the Staines bypass, you're well placed to do so





RUN LIKE THE WIND: Ghibli is a hot and dry Mediterranean wind that comes from the Sahara. Maserati has a tradition of naming models after winds. To be fair, it's probably not the only Italian that's full of hot air.

► experience that even has the Bee Gees sounding half decent. If the radio's not to your liking, the Bluetooth-enabled system means you can play your favourite artists from your mobile while you drive. A word to the wise, though: make sure you line up a playlist before you're in motion, or your journey will consist entirely of songs played in alphabetical order. Even Bruce Springsteen starts to sound tired when you've heard the tenth version of *Born to Run*. (Yes, I do have ten versions of *Born to Run*. I like running. And Bruce. A lot.)

You would be forgiven for playing no music at all, though. The snarly trumpet sound of

The Ghibli S delivers the sophisticated Italian style and fast-paced thrill of a sports car, with a handy five seats

the twin-exhaust tailpipes, especially in sport mode, means the best way to drive through the Irish countryside is with the windows down and the revs up. The alarmed goats and lambs aren't fans but, unsurprisingly, this car's after a rather less pastoral crowd.

We find said crowd a few hours later. As we purr into the car park of the Giant's Causeway, a dramatic stretch of basalt stacks touching the wild Atlantic Ocean, I – sorry, my Maserati – encourages more nods of approval. Chic, designer-draped Italian tourists whistle and clap, while the car park attendant strokes the bonnet and abandons a coachload of grannies “just to keep an eye on her for you”.

He's not the only fan. Our next enthusiast is the most excitable of them all. His mouth drops open, his eyes widen and shine with delight and he raises his hands in an eager thumbs-up gesture (admiring my red, £432-a-pop brake callipers, no doubt). OK, so an enthusiastic eight-year-old kid in milk bottle glasses may not be Maserati's target market, but having a young supporter is no bad thing. After all, this is a saloon car (albeit one that's trussed up like a sporty two-door), and the ample leg-

room and 500-litre boot could work well for long, family journeys. Or those golf clubs.

At just shy of £81,000 with all the extras (the shimmery paint, heated seats, rear parking camera and the rest), the Ghibli S delivers that sophisticated Italian style and fast-paced thrill of a sports car, with a very handy five seats.

As for a glass of Bushmills' finest? Forget about it. With the keys to a Maserati, I'm more than happy to be the designated driver. ■

For more information, see MASERATI.CO.UK



GAME ON: All Antrim Coast road trips should detour inland to the Dark Hedges, featured in the first episode of *Game of Thrones* second season. The avenue of beech trees was planted by the Stuart family in the 18th century, and now makes a good place to put your foot down. Just mind the tourists.