



Alfa Romeo Stelvio review: Does the Stelvio pass?

By Leow Ju-len, Business Time



CAN you even call yourself a car enthusiast if you've never owned an Alfa Romeo? Some of the prettiest cars to live in the hearts of men have been Alfas, after all. Many of their engines sang like Pavarotti and some looked like Michelangelo sculpted them, because Alfa just knew your friends wanted to peek under the bonnet.

The brand's cars kicked butt and took names in the very earliest days of Grand Prix racing, too. And if nothing else, the company gave one Enzo Ferrari his big break. No doubt about it, the world would be a much drearier place if Alfa Romeo had never existed.

Yet, Alfa's reward for all that has been scant. The company has a history of bleeding ink as red as its historic racing cars. Even if it hit its production target for 2023, it would still be less than a twentieth the size of BMW.



What Alfa needs to do is build cars that more people want, while keeping enthusiasts happy. That's a bit like saying all you need to do to swim to Australia is head south-east and be careful not to collide with Java.

Nevertheless, that explains the Stelvio, which is the Alfa product for a world gone mad for sport utility vehicles (SUVs). Having undergone a facelift, it has new headlamps that sport a triple-LED motif, a lightly resculpted front bumper and some smoked tail-lamp covers. There may be more, but as far as I can tell, that's it.

Inside, you get a revamped entertainment system that works with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, and that ticks the boxes on what people want from their car's touchscreen (though it's worth pointing out that there's still a little rotary dial for controlling the system, as well).



What's still in the Stelvio is a nice feeling of solidity. Some plastics are cheap, but most wouldn't feel out of place in a BMW, and the seats feel like they were built for WWE wrestlers. The gorgeous red upholstery is a visual treat, too.

The dashboard's overall layout makes the Alfa look dated inside, but I'm glad the Stelvio's facelift didn't bring in a giant screen to control every last thing. You still get a raft of physical buttons for the climate system, and what a relief that there's still a knob to turn the music up and down with.



But the plastic surgeon wielded his scalpel lightly either because Alfa is skint or, as I prefer to believe, because the Stelvio got so many things right from day one. It has a lovely stance, and its natty front end blends smoothly with its athletic body. And as your eye moves toward the rear, it all culminates in a pert and shapely backside. Not for Alfa is the voluminous bulk of the typical SUV, and yet the Stelvio still manages to have a biggish 525-litre boot.



Alfa has its priorities right, too. The car's bonnet, tailgate, doors and front fenders are made of aluminium, to save weight. In fact the Stelvio is meaningfully lighter than its German rivals (meaning the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Mercedes GLC), though it's also a bit smaller, with a shorter wheelbase leaving less room in the rear.

But the Alfa does deliver in bang-for-buck terms. The only version on sale here is the Stelvio Veloce, whose 2-litre turbo engine delivers 280 horsepower. That's enough to punt the Alfa to 100 kmh in just 5.7 seconds, making it as quick as, say, a Volkswagen Golf GTI.

It also has an all-wheel drive system, so I reckon you could get a Stelvio to do a bit of mild mud-slinging if you really wanted. Though it doesn't look that high off the ground, it'll clear roughly 20 cm without bashing its privates against a rock, which is similar to an X3's ground clearance.



But it's an Alfa, so despite the lofty ride height, it goes neatly around corners. You have to push seriously hard to upset its composure, and the quick steering means it changes direction in an alert, near-darting sort of way. Mind you, the suspension is pretty stiff, so the Stelvio will always remind you that you chose sportiness over comfort.

I think an Alfista's bigger gripe would be that the engine doesn't have much character. It's not particularly revvy, and it sounds like someone's flabby cousin. That's a shame, because none of its rivals sound any good either, and giving the engine an operatic touch would have made the Stelvio stand out.

Still, Alfa's modest sales numbers mean that driving a Stelvio makes you stand out by definition. That's not enough reason to buy one, so it's just as well that there are others: it's enjoyable to drive, it's powerful, and it's lovely to look at. It's also the most spacious Alfa in the back, with the largest boot. Driving a Stelvio entitles you to call yourself a car enthusiast, in other words, but it also lets you call yourself a sensible chap.

Alfa Romeo Stelvio Veloce

Engine 1,995 cc, 16-valve, turbocharged in-line four Power 280 hp at 5,200 rpm Torque 400 Nm from 2,000 to 4,800 rpm Gearbox Eight-speed automatic 0-100 kmh 5.7 seconds Top speed 230 kmh Fuel efficiency 9 L/100 km Agent Capella Auto Pte Ltd Price S\$327,888 with COE Available as at time of article.