

# THE LAST

There have been Maseratis since the Bora was unveiled in 1971, but none are worthy of rightly deserved then owes more than a little to the 1971 debuts of the Daytona and

NOT AS COMMON IN AN ITALIAN telephone directory as 'Ferrari', easier to pronounce than 'Lamborghini' and more richly resonant than 'De Tomaso', Maserati isn't merely a good name for a supercar maker, it's *the* name. You can stretch it out like pizza dough, roll it around on your tongue as playfully as a pasta twist and make it hang in the air more pungently than a whiff of Parmesan freshly grated onto a steaming bowl of minestrone.

Through narrowed lips and clenched teeth try this: Maaaserraaatee . . . *Bellissimo*. Sounds good, doesn't it? Now try this: Boorraa . . . and remember to roll the 'r'. You become Italian as you're saying it — an olive-skinned, stubble-chinned Italian racing driver with leather goggles, chisled cheekbones, an easy way with opposite lock and a winning way with women. The name has romance and magic: not so much a bloodline as a scarlet reservoir.

Or rather, it did. Back in the red-mist days of the 450S, the Birdcage, the Sebring; the golden era of the Mistral, the Mexico, the Ghibli, the Indy and, of course, the Bora — the last and greatest of the big-engined road-going Maseratis. And big-engined they had to be: beefy, charismatic, quad-cam V8s with crackle-black rocker covers; engines that topped 300bhp without breaking sweat. What sort of prissy, dainty-toed aberration was the Merak? A Bora with make-up, a 3-litre V6 and an effete 220bhp — the great car's teenage sister.

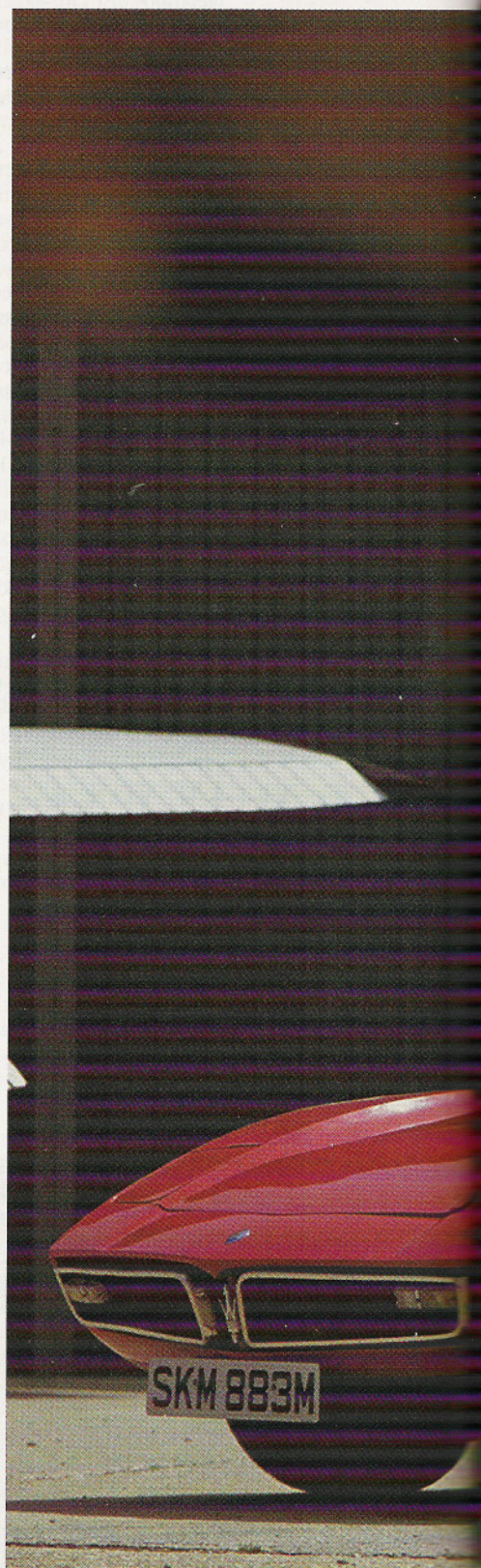
The Biturbo, today's sober-suited heir to the famous Modenese family's estate with worrying yuppie aspirations, has its devotees but cannot be taken seriously within the context of Maserati's great achievements. What car with less aesthetic identity than a 3-series BMW but such a flashy clock could be? What's more, however expressively you pronounce 'Maserati', 'Biturbo' will always sound cold and technical.

Getting noticed was never the Bora's problem, and its name — like 'Mistral', a kind of breeze that blows around Trieste — was perfect for a car that looked like a rock shaped by a mercurial wind. In fact, it was shaped by a mercurial talent, that of Giorgio Giugiaro who had just set up his own firm, Ital Design, after glittering careers with Bertone and Ghia.

This was the late '60s. The Lamborghini Miura, Ferrari Dino and De Tomaso Mangusta had already set the trend for stunningly-styled mid-engined supercars ▶



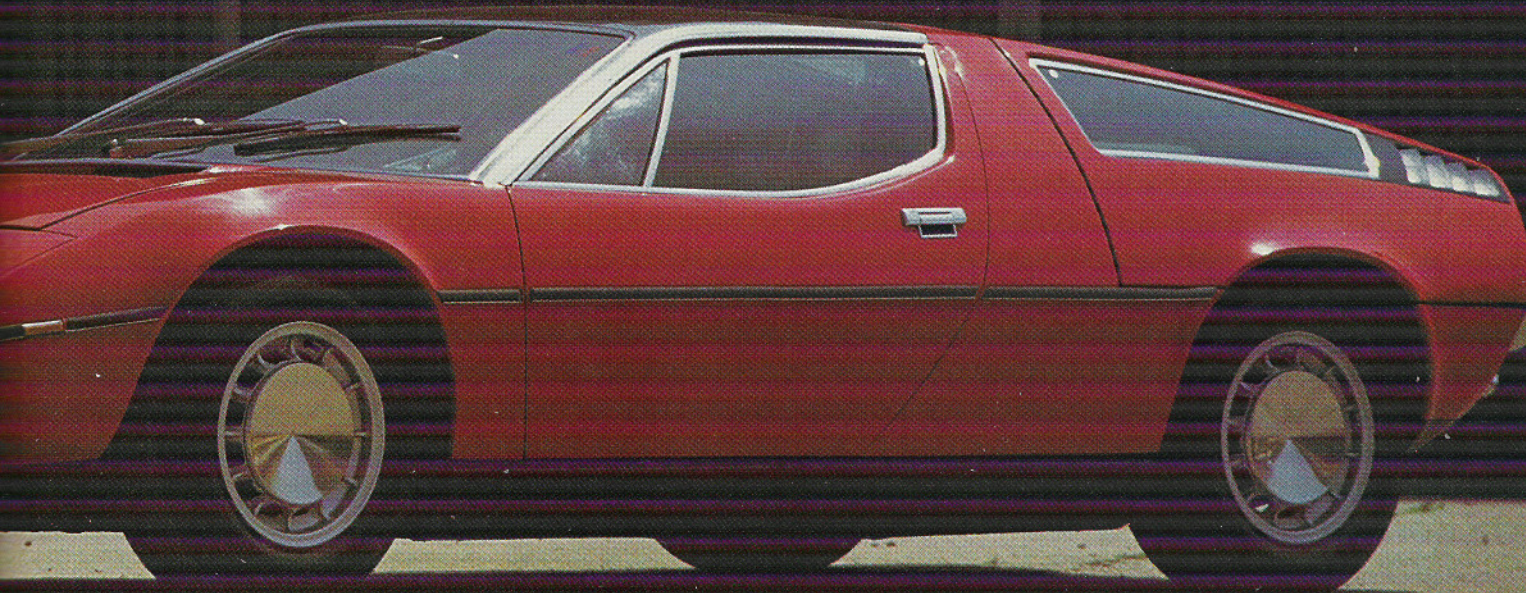
**One of the great supercar shapes — simple and bold, with just a hint of drama. Pop-up headlights (above) are worked by Citroen high pressure hydraulics. The name (below) that says it all**





# MASERATI

that magical, evocative name. That the mid-engined supercar failed to receive the acclaim it the Countach. David Vivian revisits Maserati's best supercar. Photographs by Stan Papior







◀ and Maserati, more solvent than ever before thanks to the financial backing of Citroen, wanted a slice of the action. Development of the Bora therefore started in 1968. Maserati's brilliant Giulio Alfieri, an engineer with racing in his blood, took care of the mechanical design and provided the steel monocoque for Giugiaro's bold, yet simple, curves.

The Bora's engine — a 4719cc, all-alloy V8, mounted longitudinally ahead of the rear wheels — was a distant relation of that which powered the 450S to World Sports Car Championship wins at Sebring and in Sweden in 1957. It had two chain-driven overhead camshafts per bank, four 42DCNE carburetors and a crankshaft that ran in five main bearings. Peak outputs were 310bhp at 6000rpm and 339lb ft of torque at 4200rpm. Heavy the Bora may have been, but its shape was good. Road tests put its top speed on the far side of 160mph, 0-60mph in 6.5secs and 0-100mph in around 15. The V12 engines of Ferrari and Lamborghini may have attracted all the gasps but, for those in the know, the Bora's powerplant was a true masterpiece.

It required a classy suspension for such formidable power to be effectively applied to the tarmac and race-ready Alfieri was the man to supply it: wishbones and coils all round, anti-roll bars at both ends. Also, a car weighing around 3300lb needed heavy-duty stopping: huge (11ins) ventilated discs at each corner performed the task. Transmission was ex-Ford GT40 and soon-to-be De Tomaso Pantera ZF five-speed with a dog-leg slot for first, steering unassisted rack and pinion.

As well as cash, Citroen contributed some typically idiosyncratic thinking to the Bora's design in the form of high-pressure hydraulics for the brakes, the pop-up headlights and, perhaps most intriguingly of all, the seat-tilt and pedal-reach adjustments.

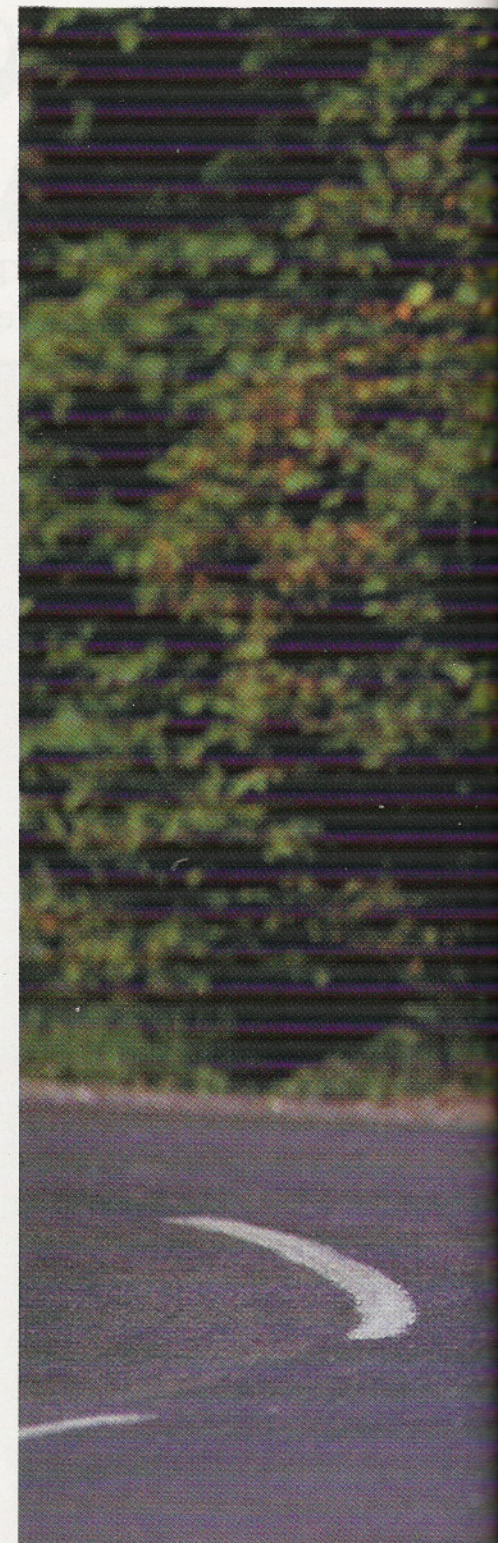
By the turn of the decade, the development programme had come a long way and Maserati's ace test driver, Guarino Bertocchi, was busy wearing out sets of 215/70 x 15 tyres

**Maserati Bora doesn't have a great deal of outright grip by the best modern standards, but it makes very good use of what it does have. It adopts a mild neutral stance with speed and oversteers on the limit**



fine-tuning the chassis. Ironically, the legendary Bertocchi (with Maserati since 1925) was one of the Bora's strongest critics at its conception but clearly instrumental in ensuring that it was born one of the best-sorted supercars of its era.

That happened in March 1971 at the Geneva motor show. It was a good year for great supercars. The Swiss salon was also used to unveil the prototype Lamborghini Countach and the Ferrari Daytona. The most outrageous creation of Giugiaro's old boss Bertone, the implausibly wedge-shaped Countach made the Bora look like an exercise in demureness while the Daytona took the phallic insinuations of the E-type and turned them into public announce-







ment. The Bora was overshadowed by a Lamborghini with a slang word for a name and a well-hung Ferrari. Any other year, and it would have grabbed the limelight for itself.

It lived for seven years — as a US market-inspired 4.9 from 1976 during which time 571 examples were made. A red one, made in 1974, ended up in the garage of Jim Buss, owner of the Dering Arms pub in Pluckley, Kent. Jim bought his less than pristine supercar in the spring of 1986 for the price of a fast hatchback and will soon be looking to sell it for the price of a fairly big house. It would seem that, with Ferrari prices still threatening to punch more holes in the ozone layer than the modern industrial world's entire output of

CFCs, forgotten supercars like the Bora have suddenly been remembered again. For Jim's part, he's had the sagging suspension sorted out, the carburation overhauled, the engine cover rust eradicated, the body repainted and the Citroen hydraulics fortified. Next job, Jim smiles ironically as he hands over the keys, is to stop the clutch leaking.

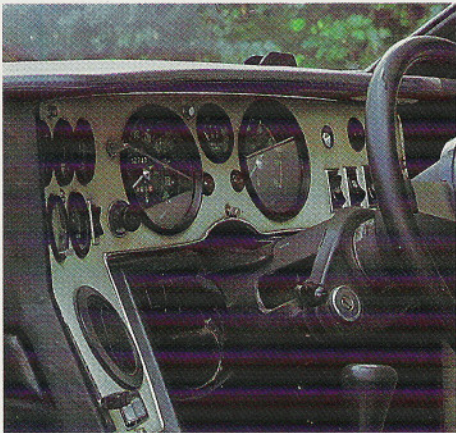
Unlike a Countach — which looks bigger than it is — the Bora looks smaller. The shape is neat and tidy: it makes no grand gestures beyond a very obvious and appealing clarity of line and boldness of purpose. Its detailing is unfussy to the point of being plain. Take the alloy wheels — they wear simple steel hub caps. And the tail is an anti-climax: — it's clean and

straightforward, with small rectangular tail lamps. And yet, as you walk round it, the shape works. It's low and elegantly proportioned with just a hint of drama. Like good acting, you're not aware of the effort that's gone into it — it simply looks right and natural.

The cabin is a more overt expression of supercar style. Before you notice how wide it is — better appreciated from behind the wheel than peering in through the door aperture — you notice the long, curved dentist-chair seats with their densely-pleated one-piece centre sections and the almost ridiculously small steering wheel. Both look intimidatingly oddball, but there's no reason to worry. Slip down into the slinky leather 'L' and it feels ▶



**Dials (below) are slightly obscured by the rather kicked-up spokes of the small steering wheel. Cabin is more overtly supercar than exterior suggests. Delivery from 4719cc all-alloy V8 still feels impressive**







**Attractive lines of Bora (above) were penned by Gluglaro. Seats (opposite) look like dentists' chairs but are surprisingly comfortable. Secret stowage cubby hole (below) is good place to put dip stick rag**

fine, providing support all the way from the top of the shoulders to the calves. The tiny wheel looks more sensible straight on, too. It obscures a few of the minor dials but you can see most of the big speedo and revcounter.

It adjusts for reach manually but the pedal box mimics its action on hydraulic struts (providing there's enough pressure left in the system if the engine's not running). Columns of oil are also used to tilt the seat forward about a pivot point close to its leading edge. Doing this in isolation feels extremely odd but, in conjunction with the steering wheel and pedal adjustments, it helps tailor a close to ideal driving position with few of the 'Italianate' compromises that might have been expected. In terms of glass area, visibility is OK but, rather like a Porsche 928, the bulkiest bits of the body are out of sight. Only if you want an expensive repair bill are they out of mind, too.

The Bora drives beautifully. It starts with the usual few seconds of high-pitched ignition whine followed by a bark of combustion and a momentary lumpiness. But, after that, it's all mellowness and soul. Throttle response isn't especially quick — not by 205 GTI or Honda CRX standards, at any rate — but neither does the big V8 appear to have much internal inertia. The engine blips crisply and energetically, but it always sounds deep and silky.

Slide the stubby gearlever back into first, ease out the heavy clutch and the Bora trickles benignly away. Back in the mid-70s at MIRA my road testing predecessors would have used a somewhat more brutal technique to get the big car off the line, but it isn't just out of respect for Jim's property that the gentler approach seems right today.

Roosevelt said speak softly and carry a big stick. That's the way the Bora does things: to great effect but with little apparent effort. It doesn't need tyre-smoking histrionics to justify its existence. Far better to let it burble up to 15mph, select fifth gear and then floor the throttle. Unlike some more highly-strung exotic multi-cylinder machinery, this engine

doesn't choke, chug or splutter. It gargles, growls and goes — smoothly and strongly and with mounting urgency.

Third's a great overtaking gear. By 2000rpm, the engine's hauling, by three-five it's howling and by five it's flying. After that, the power ebbs gently away until, at the 6000rpm red line, you've reached a natural break and it's time to change up. At this point, a modern high-tech car like the Honda CRX VT would have 2000rpm in hand: it would also be a small dot in the rear view mirror. The Bora is still too quick to be up-staged by a brat.

Subjectively, it seems about as quick as a Porsche 928 S4 and the figures agree. It feels like the Porsche in another way, too: the superb balance of its chassis. That isn't to say the 928 handles like a classic mid-engined exotic but the Bora more like a well-sorted front-engined car. The steering is direct and informative but, because of the relatively tall 70-series tyres, its responses are slightly soft. This trait is well in keeping with the overall character — it gives a cushioned edge to everything.

So when the mild understeer runs out, the transition to gentle oversteer can be gauged through the tyres as they flex, before the weight of the engine over the rear wheels starts to move the tail physically sideways. And move it will, given enough provocation. Intercept the slide early and you'll want to do it again. Let it swing too far and you'll have to swallow your heart. This isn't an academic race track issue. What was great grip in the '70s is ordinary today. The Bora doesn't hide its handling in the shadow of all-pervading grip like many a modern supercar. You have to *drive* it.

But that's no hardship. This is a real Maserati, after all; a real Italian car that looks good and makes you feel better. What's terrific is that most of the time it's a doddle to drive — big-hearted, friendly, relaxing. When you want to play, it's game. Serious ground covering is in its repertoire, too. Maserati doesn't make 'em like this any more. Who does? ■

