



Steve Says The Stelvio Entertainment Package Was Lacking

Now in its 3rd model year, the Stelvio receives a mild freshening for 2020 focusing improvements on the tech side.



How much do you care about driving? Is it an annoyance or a passion? That's a question you should answer before shopping for your next vehicle because no matter what it is in life, you pay for precision and if it's something you don't particularly care about then why would you?



Which brings me to the Stelvio; the least expensive, Italian-made SUV you can buy ...that is if you don't count the Jeep Renegade/Fiat 500X twins. And when you hear the name Alfa Romeo you immediately picture a sporty, red, head-turner and wouldn't you know it, that's exactly what I have here.



This is the 2020 Stelvio Ti Sport - ranked 5th in the 7 trim lineup with a starting price of \$49,595 including destination. All-wheel drive comes standard on the Ti Sport and upgrades include sport-tuned dampers for the double wishbone front suspension, sport seats with power side bolsters and a manual thigh extender, these huge, aluminum, fixed-in-place paddle shifters, aluminum interior trim and gloss black window surrounds and roof rails.



This one here adds over \$12,000 in optional equipment, the most notable being the \$1,350 Sport Performance Package which contributes the active, dual mode suspension and limited slip differential from the hardcore Quadrifoglio so that, I would say, is a must have item.



But the news for this model year centers on much needed improvements made to the electronics and driver assistive features. So now there's a screen you can

control via touch or through the rotary knob on the updated center console.



Right out of the gate, the Stelvio had a dreadfully aged infotainment system but now there's an adequately sized touchscreen that can also be controlled from the center console. Yes, there are improved graphics, an expanded navigation view and new performance pages but still and all, this is a band aid and not a cure for Alfa's weakest link - their interiors.



It looks great and the drive is very entertaining but the IT upgrades only go so far in making this Stelvio feel like you're riding in a nearly \$62,000, premium-brand SUV. Though there's now a Wi-Fi hotspot and a mobile app with a host of connectivity features, this new system is still laggy and considering that Alfa is in the Fiat Chrysler portfolio it's illogical that they don't use UConnect in here much like Maserati does. And then with the \$3,250 Active Driver Assist Package there's now adaptive cruise control with lane keep and traffic jam assist that will do some of the steering for you, traffic sign recognition, active blind spot assist, driver attention alert and more. So that definitely helps modernize things though a head-up display would certainly be a welcome addition. This wireless charge pad is also a nice touch but overall there's not much creativity to the cabin design...very little to lead you to believe this is something special and the rear seats lack any of the sculpting of those in the front so your passengers will be flailing around as you have fun from the driver's seat.



Though the Quadrifoglio is THE Stelvio to have, it's understandably too much money for most but that's OK because if you're a road less traveled kind of person the mainstream Stelvio models still offer something pleasing and unique to drive. From behind the wheel,

you're undoubtedly piloting a turbo-4 as the boost takes a moment or 2 to kick in but this little sucker is power dense and so it gives off a vivacious vibe once things get moving. And fitted here with adjustable dampers, there's a likable softness in how the Stelvio traverses a road...with a little bit of floatiness that keeps things quite comfortable while affording that go get em kind of spirit. And the thinner rim on this smallish steering wheel feels great in the hand and is quick to react just like this stellar transmission when it's in manual mode. So I'd categorize this Stelvio as definitely being more fun to drive than most but probably not something that's going to get you all excited about the experience.



The 306 pound-feet of torque produced by the twin-scroll turbo is a hoot and the tried and true German-built 8-speed auto is as quick to shift as any newfangled dual clutch gearbox without any of the manual-like weirdness. Paddle shifting is the Stelvio's happy place for sure. The engine start-stop system though is not the smoothest. And at an even 2 tons, the Stelvio and its carbon fiber driveshaft offer a relatively lightweight option in the segment, imbuing it with its agile nature. Use the DNA selector to heighten the dynamics or preserve fuel, it's up to you. But even in Dynamic, there's too much understeer here for my liking and not enough sound but perhaps I'm just too hungover from last Quadrifoglio test. Off the line acceleration takes 5.4 seconds to 60mph after a moment of pause but feels even faster in most situations. Still, that'll beat than any BMW X3 not wearing an M badge. To be fair though, the Stelvio resides on the smaller side of the small SUV segment so you're not getting nearly the amount of rear seat and cargo room here. Also, there's almost nothing geared towards any kind of off-road journeys. Gas mileage checks in at 24mpg in combined driving on premium.



In this gorgeous tri-coat Rosso Competizione paint riding on the optional 5-hole wheels, it's still a looker. But the Stelvio remains more a curiosity for the performance minded than a serious luxury competitor.**By TestDriveNow Auto Critic Steve Hammes for SouthFloridaReporter.com, July 9, 2020**

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